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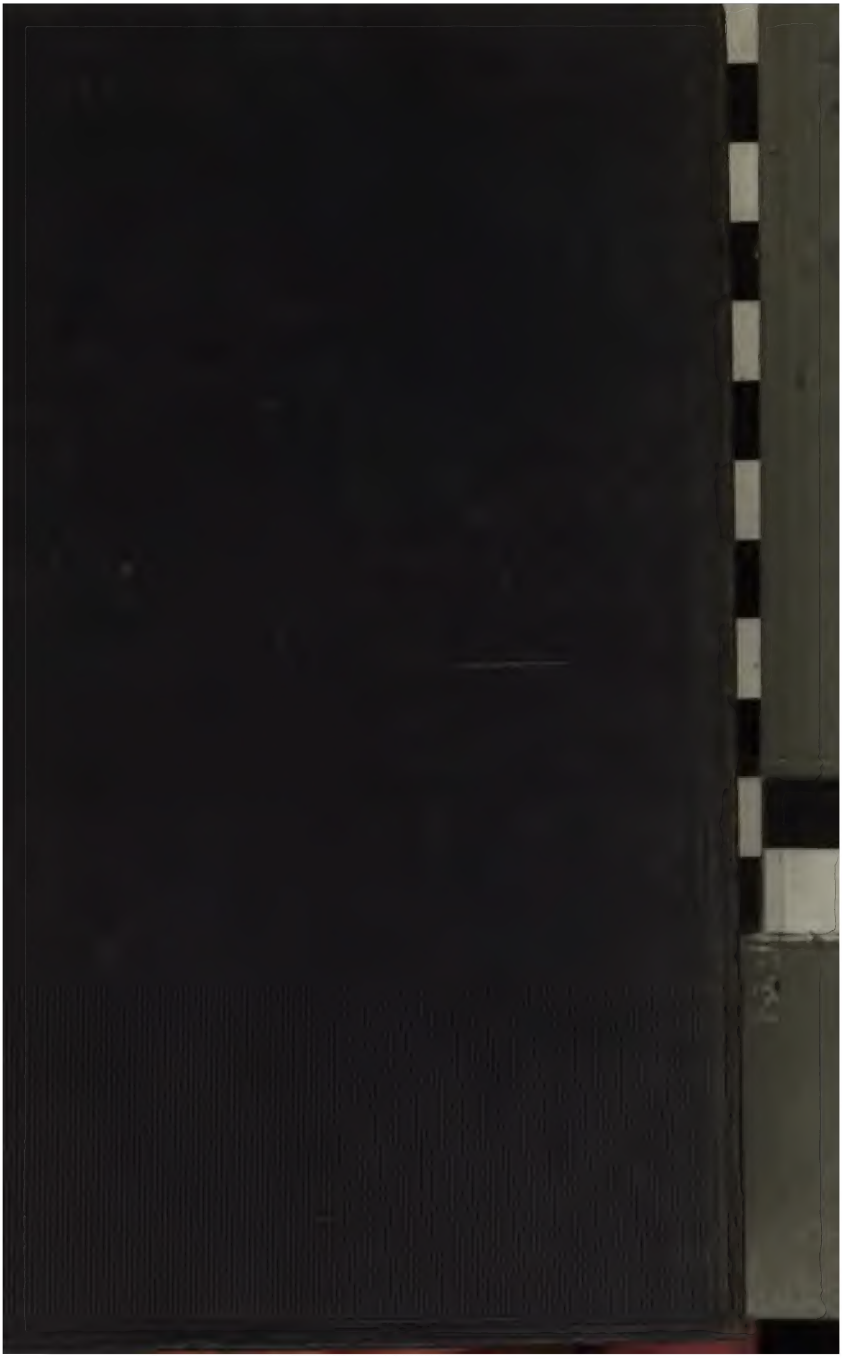

48. 161g.

TALMON AND HADASSAH.

JEWISH CAPTIVES AT BABYLON.

TALMON AND HADASSAH:

A TALE OF

The First Captivity and Destruction of Jerusalem.

ILLUSTRATIVE OF

GOD'S JUDGMENTS ON NATIONAL SIN.

Also, a Metrical Version of the

LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

BY THE REV.

HENRY SPENCER SLIGHT, B.D.,

FELLOW OF CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, OXFORD, LATE ASSISTANT CURATE OF FOREST HILL, OXON., AND CHAPLAIN IN THE ROYAL NAVY.

"GO YE NOW UNTO MY PLACE WHICH WAS IN SHILOH, WHERE I SET MY NAME AT THE FIRST, AND SEE WHAT I DID TO IT FOR THE WICKEDNESS OF MY PEOPLE ISRAEL."—JER. VII. 12.

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Dedicated,

WITH PERMISSION,

TO THE RIGHT REVEREND

THE LORD BISHOP OF OXFORD,

BY ONE OF HIS CLERGY,

IN

TOKEN OF RESPECT FOR HIS LORDSHIP'S SACRED OFFICE,

AND IN

GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF THE NAME OF

WILBERFORCE,

CONNECTED AS IT INDELIBLY IS WITH THE DELIVERANCE

OF

ENGLAND FROM ONE OF HER GREAT

NATIONAL SINS.

"Christian parents, whether bodily or spiritual, should be as careful to instruct their children what the LORD hath done to the Jews, as the Israelites should have been to tell their sons what GOD had done to Pharaoh."—JACKSON'S *Works*, Vol. I. p. 152, as quoted in HORNE *On the Psalms*, Ps. cix.

PREFACE.

THOUGH it be the boast of science to generalise, and by means of so doing to reach those elevated points which command extended and enlarged views, both in the natural and moral world, yet if man is to have a care for his fellow-men, and if all be members of one body, and interested in each other's welfare, as must be especially the case in the household of faith, we should be cautious that, while ascending to such high realms of thought and knowledge, we leave not the humbler and less instructed classes of our brethren too far behind us, and so sever the society and fellowship by which we acknowledge ourselves to be bound together. This principle the writer of the following little work would beg any who may become readers of it to keep in mind, lest it should appear

either in itself childish and trifling, or for any such reasons derogatory to the solemn subjects of which it treats.

It may be an easy, nay a pleasing task for the mind which has often travelled through the pages of ancient history, and explored its treasures and its venerable records, to supply from memory instances and incidents illustrative of every general remark contained in any brief summary of past events; but it is not so easy, even if possible, for the simple and the uninstructed to fill up the outline and general sketch of the past, nor to summon up from the stores of recollection or imagination the figures and details which are necessary to make the picture an adequate representation of what it professes to pourtray. For their sake the process by which the historian has condensed his description, and circumscribed his matter within narrow bounds, must be reversed; and in dealing with the materials so preserved, we must individualise if we would bring them to a level with the comprehension and powers of less disciplined and less educated minds.

This the author has endeavoured to do (with what success it must be for others to judge) in the instance of the sacred historic records of the first fall and destruction of Jerusalem. It has

been his object to describe in detail that, and that only, which has been recorded in a brief and general manner by competent historical authority.

The sources from which his materials have been drawn have mainly been, as it might naturally be expected on such a subject—the sacred writings themselves—and especially those of the prophet Jeremiah. Besides these, the writings of Josephus have necessarily been applied to for many particulars; and in doing so one liberty has been taken which, it is hoped, will not be regarded with severity. It is that some few particulars have been borrowed from the Jewish historian's account of the second fall of Jerusalem, and have been made applicable to its former siege, and destruction under king Zedekiah. From the hints, however, supplied by the book of the Lamentations of Jeremiah, and from the general similarity of circumstances in the two events, the writer of the present little work firmly believes that nothing has been exaggerated, nothing needlessly added for effect, nor anything too highly coloured.

With the hope therefore that the contents of the following pages may convey none but true impressions, and that such impressions may produce their due effect on the minds of some among his fellow-countrymen, he now commits the result of

his efforts to their favourable consideration—not without an earnest prayer to the throne of Grace, that all may have been done agreeably to the Divine will—and that what has been thus done may be instrumental in checking, if ever so little, "those sins which are the reproach of any people," and in promoting in our own favoured land "that righteousness which exalteth a nation."

The author wishes it to be particularly observed that in the permission kindly granted by the Bishop of Oxford for the dedication as above, nothing more is implied than his Lordship's approval of the general purport of the work; but that for all the details the author himself is solely responsible.

CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE, OXFORD,
Easter Eve, 1848.

P.S.—That it may not be supposed that anything which follows was intended in reference to recent events, the author begs leave to say that the work was entirely completed by the autumn of last year, and that nothing beyond mere verbal corrections and alterations have since been made in it.

LIST OF WOODCUTS,

PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF MR. GEORGE SCHARF, JUN.

Frontispiece—		Jewish Captives at Babylon,	BENDERMANN.
Page	54	Isaiah	RAPHAEL.
,,	64	Vignette—the light and dark parts showing which are and which are not Christian countries respectively.	
,,	77	The Fall of Dagon (see 1 Sam. chap. v.) . . .	G. SCHARF, Jun
,,	115	Landscape—The Pool of Siloam: the Tombs of the Kings.	
,,	204	Job	BARTOLOMEO.
,,	205	Elijah—adapted from early Christian paintings and sculptures in the catacombs.	
,,	215	Moses	M. ANGELO.
,,	233	Daniel	RAPHAEL.
,,	245	Plan of Jerusalem.	
,,	259	Plan of the Temple.	
,,	296	Ezekiel	M. ANGELO.
,,	306	A very ancient Persian or Parthian coin in honour of fire worship.	

Page	318	The Sabbath-breaker. (See Numb. v. 32) . . .	G. SCHARF, Jun.
,,	326	David and Daniel . . .	RAPHAEL.
,,	363	Procession of Captive Jews (from drawings in the pyramids) .	BELZONI.
,,	385	The Flight from Sodom . .	RAPHAEL.
,,	323	Landscape—The pillar of Absalom in the valley of Jehoshaphat looking northwards. The wailing place of the Jews.*	
,,	403	Jeremiah	M. ANGELO.
,,	427	Judah Fallen (from a statue over the doorway leading to the Chapter House in Rochester Cathedral.)	

* The quarter of Jerusalem in which the Jews are permitted to reside, is the lowest and most disagreeable part of the valley of the Tyropæon, between that part of Mount Zion within the walls and Mount Moriah. At the base of the latter is an ancient wall said to have formed a portion of the Temple of Solomon; and to this spot many of the Jews repair on their Sabbaths and other periods set apart for devotion, to bewail the destruction of the temple and city, and the dispersion of their people. Some of them breathe their prayers and wailings through the apertures between the stones of this ancient wall. Others bring their children to this sacred place to read the Scriptures and hear the traditions and prophecies of the restoration of the Hebrew nation.

TALMON AND HADASSAH.

CHAPTER I.

"I know not with what feeling others may read the afflictions, overthrow, slaughter, and dispersion of GOD'S ancient people, His only Church in the world, delivered into the hands of barbarous enemies, with the utter extirpation of the one part of it, and the suppression and bondage of the other; or how they may reflect upon the apparent severity of His judgment upon His own adopted people, the dishonour of His name among the heathen, or the afflicted condition of His upright and virtuous servants, whose faith and integrity were cast upon these times of perturbation and tried in the furnace; but I think the impression made upon serious minds in a review of this scene of things, will be of no ordinary sort, nor exempted from some degree of pain and amazement."—*Discourses on Prophecy*, by JOHN DAVISON, B.D. Disc. 6, part 3.

CHAPTER I.

"For those, the race of Israel oft forsook
Their living Strength, and unfrequented left
His righteous altar, bowing lowly down
To bestial gods; for which their heads as low
Bowed down in battle, sunk before the spear
Of despicable foes."

Paradise Lost, Book I.

"THE morning is again breaking," said Hadassah, as she raised herself from her sleepless bed, and observed the first rays of daylight beginning to steal through the lattices of her chamber. "The morning is breaking, but it brings with it no comfort, no cheering sounds or sights to me. The same round of misery, suspense, and uncertainty is again commencing. As former days have been, such, alas! or even worse, I fear, will this be too. Sleep on, my children, while ye can. To my eyes sleep has long been a stranger; but thanks to our GOD who denies it not to you. Few other comforts have ye now—few are those which your youthful days are likely to enjoy. Famine and the sword are but ill companions for your tender years—yea, they

spare not either the aged or the young. Oh, that such anticipations should ever find room in my mind concerning those whom I had hoped to see growing up around me in health, abundance, and happiness!—that I should now have to picture to myself such melancholy forebodings of pining hunger and cruel slaughter!—or if even these be escaped, yet then the prospect of being dragged as slaves from our country and our home to a foreign land! Alas! alas! the future is, if possible, more wretched than the present. Oh, my unhappy country, why is this affliction sent upon thee? Thy cities besieged, thy fair hills and valleys laid waste by the destroyer—thy vineyards and groves plundered and hewn down by foreign foes—those much-loved scenes of my childhood, where so many happy hours have been spent, all now desolate and in ruins—the sacred city itself, alas! now trembling for its safety—the last retreat and fortress of our hopes already falling, with us its helpless inhabitants, before the invader's hostile efforts! Can it indeed be that our GOD, who has defended us through so many dangers, and rescued our nation so often, should at length allow His chosen city, His people, His very temple, the glory of all the earth, to be given over to the spoiler? Forbid it gracious Heaven! Forbid it most holy GOD, and hear the prayer of one, who, though herself unworthy of the least of Thy mercies, yet will not cease to entreat that, in this hour of our affliction, Thou wilt once more interpose Thy gracious arm, and wilt shield from destruction ourselves and our

little ones, our ancient, sacred city, and Thine own most holy temple."

As Hadassah was just concluding her sad soliloquy, a familiar sound reached her ears through the open lattice. It was the voice of the watchman from the highest pinnacle of the temple, proclaiming, as usual, the return of daylight. "Light! light!" cried the clear and powerful voice of the herald—"light even unto Hebron!" And in the stillness of the early morn the sound was wafted far around like the silvery tones of a bell from some beacon or hill top. At that signal the morning sacrifice had been wont in former days to be immediately offered. The attendant priests stood assembled in the courts below, waiting only for the announcement of the watchman to kindle the flame and offer the accustomed victim on the altar of the LORD.* And though under the present circum-

* The custom alluded to in the text appears to have been a very ancient one. As the Jews were scrupulous in ascertaining the exact moment of sunrise, in order to offer the morning sacrifice at the proper and appointed time, a watchman was stationed on the highest and most commanding point of the temple, to announce it, while the priests and their attendants stood below in the court waiting for the signal to slay the ready-prepared victim. Lest the first signal should have been incorrect or premature, it appears that they waited for a few moments after he had given it, and then inquired of him whether the light was sufficient to enable him to see as far as Hebron. This was a small town a few miles south of Jerusalem, in the neighbourhood of which was the highest point of the hill country of Judea. Accordingly, the summits of the mountains in that direction were the first to catch the rays of the rising sun. As

stances of the city this had been now for some time interrupted, yet from the hearts of the LORD'S few surviving faithful worshippers in Judah, the morning signal claimed at least that offering, which no circumstances need interrupt, the praises and devotions of an humble and watchful spirit. Accordingly without delay, falling low on her knees, with her face towards the window, which looked directly out upon the temple, Hadassah proceeded to pour forth her soul in heartfelt earnestness before her Maker. A daughter's, a wife's, a mother's prayers ascended from her bosom, blended together like the curling volumes of smoke from the fragrant incense-altar of the temple, and she rose at length relieved and strengthened for the trials of the coming day by the spiritual discipline with which she had commenced it. And heavy trials indeed they were which each day now brought with it. Public distress and difficulty had risen to an alarming height; and in their train naturally enough domestic trials and family affliction speedily followed. For when the general welfare of a community is undermined, private happiness cannot

soon as they could be distinctly seen the watchman again repeated his announcement, and the morning offering commenced. —See Reland's Palæstina Illustrata, 4to. p. 710.

The similarity between this custom and that of the Muezzin calling with his voice to prayer from the top of the Turkish mosques and minarets is curious, and can hardly fail of striking the attention. "On a still evening, when the Muezzin has a fine voice, which is frequently the case, the effect is solemn and beautiful, beyond all the bells in Christendom."—D'Herbelot.

long continue. It is with states and societies as with the human frame. The general health of the system cannot be destroyed or injured without the comfort of its several parts and members suffering with it. So little reflection is necessary to show that regard for even their own individual welfare and happiness ought to lead men to act on the sound and broad principles of public integrity, and to consider that in so doing they are following the most sure, although it may be not always the most immediate, plan of benefiting themselves. Long, however, had all such principles been neglected among the wayward and stiffnecked leaders of the Jewish nation. And their example had now spread its infection through all ranks. The threatened evil and punishment was at last at their very doors, and the besieger had environed the holy city with his hosts, prepared in his own mind, as well as designed by the counsels of the Most High, never to quit it but in ruins. Already the most incredulous —those who had been formerly the hardiest opposers of the prophetic messengers of Heaven, began to feel secret misgivings and doubts. Wherever the recklessness of hardened sin had not driven out every better feeling, anguish was beginning to gnaw at the heart. The foresight of heavy punishment from above, now ready to fall upon them, was but clothed in greater horrors by the unavoidable feeling of its being so fully deserved. As a nation they had sinned against their God—they had indeed estranged Him from them. Many there might be whose hearts had not gone fully with the multitude

to wrest judgment and to do evil, but who yet could not deny that iniquity had abounded around them. In the bosom, perhaps, of the domestic circle, the happy mother with her youthful family had been passing a life which, to outward appearance, nay, even to her own mind probably, might seem an innocent and harmless one; but still even under the most favourable circumstances of private character, they were parts and members of a guilty nation; and when a tainted atmosphere broods over the social world, what corner or retreat shall escape its noxious influence? How stealthily may not some forbidden customs, sanctioned by prevailing use, have crept into the very heart of domestic society; and if so, then little indeed could parental love or conjugal fidelity, however unsullied, compensate for such a breach of the Divine law. Instead of being excuses for neglect in other points, these are rather themselves means and occasions of happiness granted from above, in return for which we are expected to be more grateful and more faithful to Him who is the Author of them. But to our shame we must acknowledge the reverse is too often the case—and so it had happened in Jerusalem. In base forgetfulness of the source of such blessings, other altars besides that of the Most High had been set up, so near that even the shadow of the holy temple fell upon them. If the hand then, pure as it might be from the polluting stains of avarice, immorality, or deceit, had offered on but one such altar the incense of false worship, if it had been lifted up to any strange god—nay, if only friendly intercourse

had been kept up knowingly with those who thus followed other gods, then was the plague-spot of sin already on the heart. Unconscious as its victim possibly might be of its presence, yet a stain so dark could not escape the eye of that all-seeing One "who trieth the very heart and reins."

CHAPTER II.

"It is to be lamented that the characters of Scripture, especially of the Old Testament, have to us almost a cold and shadow-like existence, as though of another nature, a different humanity; but these were in reality the very types of us, so felt, so strove, so hoped, so erred, so suffered! It is strange that we do not more regard the Bible as the wonderful link between ourselves and the first of the earth; the mirror of a divine tradition, wherein man beholds as in a glass his own face thousands of years ago. Even as a history it precedes all others, and it transcends all that is elsewhere sublime and lofty in the story of mankind."—Preface to *Lays of Israel*, by A. M. LORAINE.

CHAPTER II.

"Children were his delight;—they ran to meet
His soothing hand and clasp his honoured feet;
While 'midst their fearless sports supremely blest
He grew in heart a child among the rest:
Yet as a parent, nought beneath the sky
Touched him so quickly as an infant's eye:
Joy from its smile of happiness he caught;
Its flash of rage sent horror through his thought;
His smitten conscience felt as fierce a pain
As if he fell from innocence again."

JAMES MONTGOMERY.
World before the Flood. Canto IV.

HADASSAH had risen from her early and earnest exercises of devotion with a heart refreshed, or rather in her trying condition, resigned to the will of Providence. She now sat watching the fair countenances of her children as the unconsciousness of deep sleep was beginning gradually to give place before the returning symptoms of expression which the lighter slumbers of the morning caused to play over their features. Miriam, the eldest, with her two younger sisters, and Hadassah their mother, formed the party which at present occupied the sleeping apart-

ment. Miriam having now reached her fourteenth year, was daily becoming more and more a companion for her mother, and a protectress of her younger sisters. Of an age between her and her two sisters, a brother now in his twelfth year, completed the family circle—but he usually passed the night in a fortress near the city walls with his father, whose presence was required with the troops to be ready in case of any night-assault by the besiegers, or to be at his post at the earliest dawn of day.

Among the causes of Hadassah's passing so many sleepless nights, it may well be supposed that the thought of her husband and her only son being thus constantly exposed to the dangers of war was not the least. A thousand terrors such as in time of absence from any object of regard, imagination is so fertile in picturing to itself, rose up in quick succession before her anxious mind. Daily while defending the walls or while making sallies upon the besiegers some fresh victims fell beneath the sword or arrows of the enemy—and more than once had Hadassah watched the pallid countenances of the wounded as they were borne along the streets on the shoulders of their comrades. She had also in her turn, with some few others, lent what assistance she could in preparing fine linen for the bandages, and suitable nourishment for the wants of the sick, as they lingered under the effects of their wounds. Nor had she been remiss in soothing the grief of the afflicted and the orphan. Often had she stood by the side of the disconsolate

widow, who might be seen mingling her tears with the wounds, and bending in vain regret over the now lifeless form of him who had been but a few hours before her pride and her protector. Such scenes as these frequently before her eyes had naturally left no weak or transient impression on Hadassah's mind. How soon it might be her turn to require for herself the consolation which she had hitherto been employed in imparting to others, was too obvious a question to need asking.

Often too when any attack or sally upon the besieger's camp or fortifications was known to be preparing, the alarm spread quickly among the relatives of those who were selected for such dangerous service—and many a harrowing scene of parting friends took place in the immediate neighbourhood of the city gates, as the troops were assembling and being marshalled for the occasion. The same spot continued crowded and busy with the hum of anxious voices, till some intelligence arrived of the issue of the attack. On more than one of such occasions Hadassah had availed herself of some friend's house nearer than her own to the city gate, that she might thus be able to obtain the earliest tidings from the battle field. There with inward prayer and trembling suspense of mind she awaited the return of Talmon, her husband, from the scene of conflict. Occasionally success crowned their efforts, and the enemy suffered severely from the attack. Hope seemed again to beam on the beleaguered daughter of Judah. Rejoicings were made, and the shout of triumph arose as the vic-

torious band, fresh from the battle, rejoined their friends and companions in the city. But it was a hollow sound. It was no more than the treacherous fever-flush on the features of the bed-ridden sufferer. It was deficient in some of the most obvious symptoms of vigorous health. For such success, when it did happen, was no longer attributed to the hand of Providence, nor was the glory given to the Most High. The thank-offering of gratitude had long since become a forgotten ordinance. It would have been indeed but mockery for those to offer such sacrifices who were daily acting in direct defiance of GOD'S express commands delivered to them by the voice of His prophets. Thus both success and defeat became, after the excitement of the moment had died away, very similar in their consequences. Of those who sallied forth, some were always left behind, some brought back lifeless corpses, and the voice of lamentation was ever mingled with the shout of victory. The following day generally presented a scene still more harrowing and distressing. Those who had been taken prisoners by the enemy were brought forth as trophies of their adversaries' valour, and every expedient was adopted in order to make them objects of warning to their fellow-countrymen. In the sight of their own homes and their own companions, who were watching on the fortifications, in the very hearing of their own dearest relatives they were put to a cruel and ignominious death—and their bodies left exposed to the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air.

It needed no great aid from the powers of imagination to conjure up feelings and ideas of alarm in the mind of any mother, wife, or relative, when such events were actually and frequently occurring around them. Hadassah's devoted heart escaped not its full share of daily and painful suspense. The protecting hand which had so long preserved Talmon from the shafts or the fetters of the enemy might suddenly be withdrawn, and she might be at any hour left helpless and a widow, to contend, together with her young family, against the daily-increasing hardships of the siege. These, even with a husband's powerful assistance and protection, it had now become difficult to provide against —and what might await her at a still later stage, if the enemy should at length prevail, provoked and irritated as they now were by the severe hardships of a long siege, even imagination enabled her not to picture to herself. The precipice, on the brink of which she now stood, was indeed a fearful and giddy one. The darkness of futurity was in mercy allowed to conceal from her view the horrors that lurked below. Rapidly, however, did this long train of melancholy reflections on the past and forebodings of the future, such as we have described, pass through her mind, as she now at the commencement of another day sat waiting and watching with a mother's anxiety, till the waking voices of her young companions should recall her attention to the more active duties of life.

The attendants who had formerly assisted her in the duties of the nursery, and who in those days

seldom, after once becoming members of a family, ever left it through life, even these it had been necessary to dismiss—for the scarcity of the common provisions and necessaries of life had now rendered it an indispensable matter that the greatest frugality and economy in the management of the small remaining family stock should be practised. Hadassah herself, therefore, with the assistance of her daughter Miriam, undertook these and many other household duties to which she had been hitherto unaccustomed. As neither of her little party seemed yet to show signs of requiring her immediate assistance, she seized the opportunity of stealing away for a few moments, to take as she had often been wont to do, a hasty view at sunrise from the flat-terraced roof of the house. There the whole family, according to Eastern custom, had been in the habit of assembling at even-tide, to enjoy the cool breeze and commanding view which it afforded. It was with a very different object, and under the influence of feelings greatly altered, that Hadassah now repaired to what had been the well-known scene of so many happy and domestic meetings. It was a fair view which from that spot formerly, in times of peace, met the eye of the beholder, as the sun rose upon the ancient city of Jerusalem. Nor could the sad change, which war's wasting ravages had now for nearly eighteen months been busy in effecting, obliterate from Hadassah's mind the recollection of what it once had been. At each of the many gates might formerly have been seen, as faithful memory well painted it to her view,

the busy throng, some arriving, others departing, as their respective employments and objects required —long trains of mules with their drivers slowly approaching from the surrounding hills and valleys, laden with the fruits and vegetables of their luxuriant climate, the luscious fig, the ruddy pomegranate, the melon, clusters of ripe grapes, with abundant store of wild honey in the comb, and oil from the beaten olive, all hastening to supply the daily wants of the inhabitants of that favoured land. Like a queen on her mountain throne, Jerusalem looked down on the neighbouring valleys and groves, and seemed thus receiving each morning fresh tribute and homage from her fruitful domains. And long might she have continued to receive them, had she, like them, paid but the tribute of daily homage to her Sovereign above.

As the eye carried its searches a little beyond the gate, through which those bounties of a kind Providence were so plenteously pouring in, fair gardens were once to be seen, inviting even in the distance by their shady bowers, their verdant slopes, and the glowing colours of their parterres, each within its own little boundary offering, with the apparent gladness of kind Nature, its tribute of cool shade, refreshing fruit, and pleasing prospect for the comfort and gratification of their several owners. Earth in grateful acknowledgment for the hand of culture, refused not its tribute, public or private, for the wants of its masters. And had but they its masters similarly rendered their tribute of praise and homage, domestic as well as national, to their

heavenly Master, then that sad change which now met Hadassah's view, had never been allowed to sweep over the fair face of the country in which stood the city of her fathers.*

It was indeed a melancholy, a desolating change. Gardens no longer adorned the surrounding valleys, nor did the inviting summer-house or villa smile from amid the rich foliage of groves and bowers. Fire and sword had laid all such emblems of peaceful prosperity low in the dust.† The ravages of the besiegers, impatient as they now were, at their long detention and tedious labours, had spread desolation far and wide. Partly in order to warn the besieged of what would await them if they did not surrender themselves, much havoc had been committed within sight of the city walls; partly also to furnish materials ‡ for building forts, and for raising mounds and embankments against the fortifications, they had destroyed all the buildings within many miles of the city, and had cut down trees of

* The west side of Mount Olivet is bedecked with olives, almonds, fig trees, and heretofore with palms, pleasantly rich when husbanded.—Sandys' Travels, Lib. III. p. 158.

"The situation of this capital city of Judea has always been extremely advantageous. The agreeable variety of rising grounds with which it was encompassed, the fruitful meadows that lay between, interspersed with clear rivulets and wholesome streams; the hills on which it stood, which rose gradually one behind another, and looked like a natural amphitheatre, made up as pleasing and delightful a prospect as can well be conceived."—Univ. Hist., Book 1st, Chap. VII., p. 796. XVI.

† See Josephus. Wars of the Jews, Lib. VI., s. 7.

‡ Jer. vi. 6.

every description that could be made available for their purpose. The tombs and burying-places of the nobler families, many of them situated in these gardens, had not escaped, as it might easily be supposed, from their share of contumely. Among enemies who, like the Assyrians, despised the Jewish religion, it would indeed have been more than surprising, had they omitted such an opportunity of insulting their foes. Yet among Eastern nations, whose reverence for the dead is excessive, how great a provocation and insult this proved, we can scarcely imagine. Such, however, was but one feature amid the general scene of devastation which war, with its destroying hand, had now so deeply engraven on the outward face of things around the sacred city of Jerusalem.

Hadassah's eye, from frequent but sad surveys of it, as it gradually advanced, had now become familiar with it, but the objects to which her attention was now more anxiously directed. were the tents and troops of the Assyrian host. "Were they still," she asked despairingly of her own heart, "still obstinately persevering in their hostile intentions? Had no succours arrived to rescue the daughter of Judah from her impending danger? On what grounds could the enemy still hope after so long a resistance to be successful?" Alas! there was but little consolation for her fears—but little food for her hopes in the reply which a moment's view in either direction afforded. The enemy's wide-spreading encampment, their numerous troops of horses fastened at the outside of the tents for the night—the

guards still gathered in small groups around the watch fires *—all these were so many proofs that, as far as human foresight could judge, this day was to be as yesterday, or even worse. "Oh what shall be the end of these things?" she exclaimed to herself—and, without stopping to take another look, she hastened back, with a heavy heart, and a moistened eye, to the chamber which she had but a few minutes before quitted.

As she entered it again, she found Naarah her second daughter already awake and beginning to look round with some little alarm at missing her mother from the room. "Dearest mother," she cried, as Hadassah returned, "why do you leave us so often by ourselves? and what can it be that always makes you wake so early now? We used to wake the first and to arouse you, but now it is always you; and are you ill, dear mother? or what makes you look so sad and pale? And where is Deborah our nurse? When is she coming back again? Let her come to us this day, my mother, and then you will be able to sleep on quietly, as you used to do, till we awake you."

The fond interest and inquiries of her child proved, as they had so often done before, sweet and soothing balm to Hadassah's troubled heart. Like the first rays of the sun of domestic happiness breaking through the night of grief, those few simple words cheered her and gave her fresh energy to resume her daily round of parental duty. Although

* See Harmer's Observations, Vol. III., p. 34.

they had reminded her but too faithfully of the true grounds which she had for grief, yet they had expressed a sympathy and affection for her, which went far to compensate for that grief. At the same time their very simplicity had given her a fresh proof of the unconscious helplessness of her youthful charges, and of her own consequent responsibility as a mother and a guardian over them. Happy and enviable feelings these, and such as had often proved to Hadassah a source of the purest delight even in her brightest days; but of late their soothing influence had become doubly valuable to her—for other comforts had successively failed and been cut off from her. Even Talmon, her once fond and attached husband, had recently been much estranged both from her society, and from that of his little family. Other company and more engrossing pursuits had, in his case, as well as in that of many others, absorbed much of his attention, though Hadassah well remembered the time when his home was the central point of all his enjoyments, and his children the objects to him, as they still were to her, of the most constant and untiring interest.

When indeed, can the artless and affectionate accents of childhood fail to have a wholesome effect on a rightly constituted mind, whether it be that of a parent or not? After the wearisome intricacies and heartless forms that so often mar the pleasure of social intercourse between man and man, how refreshing are the tones of child-like guilelessness. Amid the confused din of a busy and deceitful

world, how do they sound like stray melodies escaping from some purer and happier region—their last faint echoes wafted down upon the wings of confiding love and innocence to this vale of sorrow. "Suffer little children to come unto Me," said He, who knew what was in man, "for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And little perhaps are those aware of what they are losing, who deprive themselves of such society. GOD in His good providence has so contrived His gracious plans, that even in this our fallen state, all works together for good to those who love Him. And among other instances of His wise direction of things in our behalf is that of the intermixture of different ages and different ranks in the social world. The rich, the poor, the talented, the simple, and more especially in reference to our present observations, the young and the old are all so united as to be but members of one common body, of which if one member suffer, all the others suffer with it. From neglecting to observe that union, no doubt mankind have in all ages suffered. Barriers are raised between one rank and another which Providence never raised. We lop off whole limbs from the social body, or at least cut off all intercourse between them, and no wonder, therefore, if each suffers in many ways. The unnatural degree of division and distance between the poor and the rich will always, perhaps, be the first and most evident, as well as the most pernicious of such stoppages and diseases in the social system; but others there are also which by degrees vitiate a healthy condition of domestic life. Such is the

frequent want of due and proper intercourse between parents and children. The husband once withdrawn from his home,—it matters not whether by engrossing worldly business, or by an excessive love of selfish amusement,—there is no longer any opportunity left for the real feelings of a parent's heart ever coming into play. Thus one of the fairest and easiest avenues leading to the better emotions of the human breast becomes closed. It is in the infant mind if any where, while fresh from the mould of Heaven, that we still see the pattern and image of inward innocence. The world has not yet had time to sully its lustre, nor to obliterate by its ceaseless wear that accurate impression, which in spite of the inward alloy of our nature has been graciously, and probably in mercy, allowed to remain stamped on childhood's earlier years. Yet how often are we guilty of letting this fair scene pass by unnoticed. Instead of modelling ourselves by that which the authority of Heaven has sanctioned as a fitting pattern for us, how often do we voluntarily banish ourselves from the sight of it, and allow the vain, worthless idols of the world to usurp its place. Truly man seeks out many inventions.

Where is it mothers learn their love?
In every church a fountain springs
O'er which th' Eternal Dove
Hovers on softest wings.

* * * *

Blest eyes that see the smiling gleam
Upon the slumbering features glow,
When the life-giving stream
Touches the tender brow!

* * * *

But happiest ye, &c.,
To whom, as if in hallowed air
Ye knelt before some awful shrine,
His innocent gestures wear
A meaning half divine:

By whom love's daily touch is seen
In strengthening form and freshening hue,
In the fixed brow serene
The deep yet eager view.

Who taught thy pure and even breath
To come and go with such sweet grace?
Whence thy reposing faith,
Though in our frail embrace?

O tender gem, and full of heaven!
Not in the twilight stars on high,
Not in moist flowers at even
See we our GOD so nigh.

KEBLE'S *Christian Year. Holy Baptism.*

CHAPTER III.

"How miserable then must be our life, if, even in the midst of our nearest and dearest relations, we can enjoy no Christian communion; if, even within our own house, we must serve our God alone. This is the curse of unchristian marriages, of being unequally yoked with unbelievers, of neglecting the Christian education of our children."—Arnold's *Sermons*. Vol. I. Serm. 22.

CHAPTER III.

"Gently I took that which ungently came,
And without scorn forgave. Do thou the same.
Thine own keen sense of wrong that thirsts for sin,
Fear that—the spark self-kindled from within;
Which blown upon will blind thee with its glare,
Or smothered stifle thee with noisome air."

COLERIDGE.

"From her infant days
With wisdom, mother of retired thoughts,
Her soul had dwelt; and she was quick to mark
The good and evil thing, in human lore
Undisciplined."

COLERIDGE.

It was now about an hour after sunrise, when Hadassah and her little party having left the sleeping apartment, she was about to share with them the scanty morning meal which her own hands had prepared for their use. Time had now in some degree inured them to many privations, yet it was not without an inward sigh, and a struggle hardly suppressed within her own aching bosom, that Hadassah set before her children the homely and

scarce wholesome repast, which was now all that remained for their support. When she remembered the bountiful supply of milk and refreshing fruits, of honey in the comb, and of bread from the finest flour, with which her board used to be daily spread, it was a bitter pang to her to have now only the coarsest of diet to offer to her little ones. She could willingly have denied herself every dainty and luxury, but their growing frames demanded proper and sufficient nourishment. This neither in quality nor in due quantity had she any longer the means of procuring for them. What they would once have loathed, or at least have cast away as refuse, was now their only food. A mixture of various kinds of coarse pulse with a small proportion of barley, had become necessarily their only substitute for bread.* A few herbs from some shady spot in their garden which the drought had not yet wholly withered, and a small quantity of dried fruits from the former year; these with water from their nearly exhausted cistern formed the meal to which Hadassah now called them with as much apparent cheerfulness as she could throw into her manner.

They had scarcely yet commenced partaking of it, when steps were heard crossing the court, which they soon recognised and welcomed with filial joy. In another moment Judith, the youngest of the family, was in her father's arms, her youthful features beaming with gladness, and reflecting as

* See Ezekiel iv. 9.

clearly as a mirror, the happy unconsciousness of care which is written on the innocent brow of childhood. As her soft silken tresses fell over her sparkling eyes, and shaded for a moment her small but delicate forehead, the contrast between her infant countenance, and the dark but manly features of her father, as they were now seen in the pride of manhood, set off each to greater advantage. Like the tender bud beside the full-blown flower, both springing from the same stem—each in its own distinct stage of growth pleasing to the eye, and by their contrast adding variety to their other charms—such to the eye of the observer might Talmon and his youthful daughter have appeared as he stood for a moment clasping her in his arms and gazing with a father's delight on her smiling looks. As he advanced from the open space of the court, on which the sun was now beginning to pour his powerful rays, Hadassah and Miriam were already waiting to receive him under the shelter of the shady portico which ran round the whole inner square of the house.

Warm and affectionate was the embrace which Talmon and the fair partner of his life exchanged on each occasion of their meeting under their present circumstances. Each time, as they were well aware, might be the last—for death and destruction, in one shape or another, were dealing their blows thickly around. And what was worse than all, if even from day to day safety was granted, yet there appeared no prospect of ultimate escape. The resources of the city were being fast drained to

their dregs. Those of the enemy were still undiminished; and as their efforts appeared each day more determined, sad forebodings forced themselves hourly, with more and more strength, on the minds of the besieged. Each parting of friends at such a crisis was an occasion full of uncertainty and anxiety. Naturally then the meeting again after such suspense was hailed with proportionate ardour and joy. One more arrest of the fatal stroke seemed granted, another respite gained from the impending sentence. At such moments who shall wonder if the young and sanguine were tempted to ask whether fortune might not yet brighten, and hope's withered branches put forth fresh shoots? It was with feelings and thoughts akin to these that Hadassah now met at each successive return to his home the beloved protector of herself and her little ones. Nor were such occasions without their due effect on Talmon's mind. It was in these brief intervals, snatched as they were from the stern and harassing scenes of bloodshed and warfare, that, as a husband, he first learnt to appreciate the value of domestic peace and happiness; that, as a citizen and a patriot, he first felt what were the blessings (now, alas! sacrificed) of public order and tranquillity; and that, as a man, he began, by the secret whispers of conscience, to realize what it was to fear the vengeance of an offended GOD on a nation's sins.

Hadassah, as her husband fondly clasped her to his bosom, expressed, rather by her looks than by words, the inquiries which she usually made of him

at his return. Anxious, however, to ascertain the most trifling particulars that might serve to allay her fears, she began by asking, as she had so often done before, "What tidings does my Talmon bring me this morning of the war, and of our country's enemies? Does the cruel Assyrian still continue unwearied at his post around our walls? And why comes not Zabad home? I fear this early taste of his for arms will bear but evil fruits. Would that he had never known such scenes!" "Fear not for the lad," said Talmon, "I have left him in his uncle's charge; and you know your brother's fondness for the boy too well to think he will allow any harm to happen to him. But haste, my Hadassah, and give me whatever refreshment can be most quickly prepared, for I must leave you again without delay. At the third hour the princes assemble to appear before the king. We want not added to all our other difficulties that of the prophet's disaffected cry. Our people are discouraged enough already without such needless causes to increase their fears. If the dungeon receive him not ere another sun has risen, it shall not be the fault of the princes; for this day we go before the king to entreat his consent." "What!" said Hadassah: "can it be you, Talmon, that would wish to inflict further cruelty upon the prophet? Have you not already imprisoned him, as you would do to any common malefactor? And can you desire to heap yet heavier indignities upon him? What has he done to provoke the anger of the princes afresh?" "Has he not," replied Talmon, "even

in his prison, repeated the same offence as before? Has he not been discouraging the people from any further opposition to the enemy? Has he not predicted destruction to the city, captivity to its inhabitants, and victory to our besiegers? If our hands be thus weakened, how can we any longer oppose the Assyrians who are now at our very gates? Has he not, moreover, upbraided us with crimes, and reproached us with abominations as though we were but dogs? But of these matters let him rave as he pleases. There are other prophets as able as he to tell us of such things, were it necessary. But to let him mar every plan or counsel which we can make for the defence of our very lives and homes, be the consequences on his own head. If his life answer not for it, let the king find other counsellors to advise him, and other warriors to man the battlements of the city of David."

"Oh, Talmon," said Hadassah, "by the life of these our little ones, think ere you thus speak. Has the prophet indeed foretold destruction on our holy city? Heaven defend our children! Has he indeed threatened captivity to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and shall we be dragged as slaves to linger out a life of bondage in a foreign land—we, who may then be left, the helpless survivors of a ruined nation? For will the enemy, if he once gain possession of our fortresses, will he spare those who have cost him so much labour, and loss, and bloodshed? Alas! alas! To the Most High alone is it known what He has in store for us!

But does the prophet give us no hope, Talmon?" "Ay, hope to those who would forsake their country in her distress, and be traitors to their own cause. He would have others do, as he himself attempted to do, fall away to the Chaldeans. Such he tells us is his message from heaven,—that we should give up ourselves, our city, our substance to the besiegers; and that we should purchase our lives with our liberty. But ask me no more to repeat these follies, lest I appear vile to the very wife of my bosom, while I utter the cowardly suggestions of this dreamer."

"Would GOD, that thy wife could believe them to be but dreams," replied Hadassah. "The subject of my dreams they are indeed," she continued, "for how can I drive out, either by night or by day, the thought of the fearful miseries which threaten us? Were it on my own account only that I had cause for fear, I could bear all. But these, our little ones, Talmon, with whom GOD has blessed us; oh, how can I live to see them exposed to want, to insult, to the cruel treatment of foreign and angry foes?" Clasping more closely to her bosom the little Judith, Hadassah, as her fervid imagination, with too true foreboding of the future, pictured such scenes to her mind, wept in bitterness of heart, already, in the inward world of her own fears and feelings, a widowed, childless mother.

Talmon's breast, meanwhile, was the scene of various conflicting passions. His real fears and apprehensions, which he had hardly dared breathe to himself in secret, he could not permit himself.

now to avow to others. That relief, which a pouring out of the heart in deep distress affords, he could not enjoy. It would have been treachery to his cause. It would have been condemning himself for the very design and attempt, which he, in common with the other princes, was now harbouring against the prophet Jeremiah. Yet such fears, such inward anticipations, bitter and humiliating as they were, he could not altogether stifle or disguise from himself. Pledged by former acts and former promises to oppose the prophet's counsels—already involved in the guilt of thwarting what his heart could not deny to have the testimony of the divine will for its support—unwilling to retract, unable to bear the taunts which his fellow-conspirators would have heaped upon him, had he done so—on the eve, at this present moment, of making a more determined attempt than any before on the prophet's life, all such motives and feelings hurrying him on in a course for which, at the tribunal of conscience, he stood, meanwhile, self-condemned; on the other hand, trembling secretly for the safety and honour, nay, for the very life of those dearer to him than himself, he was, in anticipation, already draining to its dregs that bitter cup of guilt and misery which his own hand, spell-bound as it might seem, was almost involuntarily preparing. The wicked are indeed like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. Retreat or advance seemed to Talmon at that moment alike difficult and embarrassing. Whatever suggestions hope for the future, or remorse for

the past, whispered as advisable, false shame forbade. As for following the direct course and adopting the prophet's advice, pride, "that pride which goeth before a fall," would not permit it. Ill could he brook submission or obedience to the advice of one whom it had long been his habit to insult, and to load with contempt and injury.

As the gathering cloud of mingled guilt and fear thus swept through the atmosphere of his thoughts and feelings, he remained for a few moments scarcely conscious of the presence of his wife and children. Dismay and distress were painted in their countenances as he again recovered himself and looked around. Unaware of the meaning or cause of such alarm and anxiety, as the manner of either parent so clearly betrayed, the younger children stood, like the flock cowering before the storm, in mute and helpless silence. A moment's glance spoke volumes to Talmon's heart; but to endure such a scene longer was impossible. A hasty embrace, enough to convey to Hadassah's mind the still undiminished strength of a father's and a husband's tenderness, was all which, without another word, he allowed himself. That over, he rushed with hasty steps towards the meeting place appointed by the princes for their assembling previously to their appearing before the king.

CHAPTER IV.

"It is impossible for the Christian traveller to look upon Jerusalem with the same feelings with which he would set himself to contemplate the ruins of Thebes, of Athens, or of Rome, or any other city that the world ever saw. There is in all the doings of the Jews, their virtues and their vices, their wisdom and their folly, a height and a depth, a breadth and a length, that the angels cannot fathom. Their whole history is a history of miracles; the precepts of their sacred book are the most profound, the best adapted to every station in which man can be placed, they moderate him in prosperity, sustain him in adversity, guide him in health, console him in sickness, support him at the close of life, travel on with him through death, live with him throughout the endless ages of eternity; and Jerusalem lends its name to the eternal mansions of the blessed in heaven, which man is admitted to enjoy through the atonement of CHRIST JESUS, who was born of a descendant of Judah."—DR. RICHARDSON'S *Travels*.

CHAPTER IV.

"Meanwhile they in their earthly Canaan placed,
Long time shall dwell and prosper, but when sins
National interrupt their public peace,
Provoking GOD to raise them enemies;
From whom as oft He saves them penitent,
By judges first, then under kings;
* * * * *
Part good, part bad: of bad the longer scroll:
Whose foul idolatries, and other faults,
Heaped to the popular sum, will so incense
GOD, as to leave them, and expose their land,
Their city, His temple, and His holy ark,
With all His sacred things, a scorn and prey
To that proud city, whose high walls thou saw'st
Left in confusion; Babylon thence called."

Paradise Lost, Book XII.

THE present object and meeting of the princes was an occasion which king Zedekiah had long foreseen and dreaded. It found him, however, no better prepared for it than if no notice or warning of its approach had ever reached him. Ten years had now passed away since he had ascended the throne of Judah. During that time much had happened to convince him, if his mind had been open to any serious conviction, that the cause of

the prophet was the cause of the GOD whose messenger he was. But all such opportunities of forming a calm, true, and well-grounded judgment were thrown away upon the weak, irresolute heart of Zedekiah. In vain had the days of his boyhood been now succeeded by a riper and maturer age, bringing to his aid the strength and experience of man's estate to enable him to wield the sceptre of his fathers with wisdom and justice. Zedekiah, when he was intrusted by Nebuchadnezzar with the kingdom of Judah, had scarcely completed his twenty-first year. And evil example, it must be owned, might at that early age have given a false bias to the best natural disposition. The rank of a king's son, and of brother to the reigning monarch, was not probably a position the most favourable, in a corrupt court, for viewing the prevailing faults and vices of the time in a true light. Flatterers and parasites, like weeds in the rankest soils, seldom fail to spring up where splendour and wealth abound. Each condition of life has its peculiar dangers and trials; and that of the great and noble is far from being an exception to the rule. Clouds and mists often envelope the summit of the lofty hill, while the inhabitant of the open plain is enjoying a clear and healthy atmosphere. If then, under the most favourable circumstances, such dangers attend the great, how much more so may we believe it to have been the case under a king like Jehoiakim, the brother and almost immediate predecessor of Zedekiah. At the time of his brother's succeeding to the throne

Zedekiah was not more than ten years old. During the most critical part of his early life, therefore, from that age till the commencement of his own reign at twenty-one, he was, in all likelihood, exposed to the baneful influence of a period of rapidly increasing depravity. The tide of wickedness, which had been rolled back by the efforts of the pious Josiah, seemed, like the reflux wave, to have retired for a brief interval, only that it might gather strength to return with increased violence. The covetousness of Ahab, the abominations of Manasseh, the oppressions of Rehoboam, appear to have found a common centre around which to rally in Jehoiakim's reign. One of his first acts had been to put to death, in the most deliberate manner, a prophet of the Most High GOD, whose only offence had been that of lifting up his voice to warn his countrymen of the divine judgment hanging over them. The aged counsellors of Jehoiakim disguised not their fears of the great evil which, by any attack upon GOD'S ambassador, they might procure to their souls.* But their protest was to as little purpose as the advice of the elders to Rehoboam had formerly been. Alarmed at his danger, the prophet Urijah fled into Egypt; but thither Jehoiakim's murderous emissaries pursued him, and brought their victim back. Time and reflection, in the meanwhile, had made no change in Jehoiakim's designs, and the prophet fell by a violent and contemptuous

* Jer. xxvi. 19.

death, at once a victim to his own duty of proclaiming the truth, and a monument of Jehoiakim's determined resistance to it. Jeremiah would probably have shared the same fate, for he was guilty of the same offence, namely, of proclaiming unwelcome truths, but a friend, firm as he was wise and upright, was raised up in his behalf. Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, who had probably inherited the office which his father held in Josiah's reign, that of one of the king's chief officers of state, interposed his powerful influence in the protection of Jeremiah, and saved him for the time.

A few such facts as these are sufficient to give a tolerably accurate idea of the state of things which prevailed during the more youthful period of Zedekiah's life. But if so sad a school for his early years as that, which the public condition of society under his elder brother Jehoiakim presented, should appear an excuse for the faults and vices of the younger brother, it must be remembered on the other hand that he enjoyed also some great advantages. His very youth would, for some little time after his father's death, naturally have been the cause of his not being allowed, nor even of his having the inclination to join in the scenes and acts of guilty pleasure in which his elders were revelling. But a more obvious and evident advantage is that so pious a father as Josiah, we must believe, would at least so long as he lived, have taken every care that his children should be educated with the strictest attention to the interests of piety and morality. His own career had been

exemplary as an individual, and as a king memorable both for his pious efforts in the restoration of the true religion, and for the success which had attended them. The temple had been cleansed and repaired, the sacrifices renewed, and above all, as a guide providentially, we may well suppose, vouchsafed in order to aid his future designs, the lost volume of GOD'S written word had been discovered in Josiah's time.

His joy at regaining so inestimable a prize, his deep remorse at having so long and so utterly, though in a great measure unconsciously transgressed its sacred precepts, must leave us without a doubt of his having taken proper means to publish and enforce its contents when known. Especially, then, in his own household, and among the children whom GOD had given him, he would labour to cultivate a reverence and knowledge of the will of JEHOVAH. Now Zedekiah, though the youngest son, and though deprived of the invaluable blessing of such a father, when but ten years old, could not have reached even that age without having gained much in the way of sound instruction and good principles from the fostering care which his royal parent would naturally have bestowed upon his children. Nor would the pious guardians and instructors, under whose charge they had been placed up to the time of his death, be likely to be removed at once or abruptly. And that there were men of such character we have positive evidence. For we see them coming forward nobly to give their counsel to Jehoiakim at the commencement

of his reign, and offering him advice which, if it had been but followed, would have saved their country many a heavy stroke of calamity.* Even supposing that Hilkiah the high-priest and Shaphan, the son of Azaliah, Josiah's chief helpers and advisers, had been gathered to their fathers before the death of king Josiah himself, yet we know that the one had left a son, Ahikam, who wanted not the fidelity to discharge the duty of a friend to the young princes, his late sovereign's children. There was also Jeremiah, and there were other prophets who, if not personally attached in any way to the royal household, yet, as Zedekiah grew up to an age when he might have sought out their counsel, would have been but too willing to offer it. And for companions it is more than probable that he must have had the society of some whose names have come down to us adorned with the brightest virtues. Only by a few years his superiors, and nearly his equals in rank were Daniel and his three friends, who were afterwards found, when in a heathen court, so firm in their allegiance to the true faith of their fathers. They, too, were of the king's seed and of the princes; and Daniel himself must have been at the time of Josiah's death about fifteen years of age, Zedekiah being, as we have said, about ten.

Neither on account of friends, companions, or example, then, up to the time of his father's death, nor even for some space after it, could Zedekiah

* Jer. xxvi. 3, 13, 16, 17.

ever have had reason to complain. He may, moreover, have enjoyed other privileges, which we know not of, such as the care of a pious mother; but these at least are evident. Such were the circumstances, with respect to his own earlier life, under which he succeeded to the throne of Judah. A reign of ten years found that throne now tottering under the combined attacks of foreign and powerful foes from without, and of urgent distress aggravated by civil dissension and a turbulent aristocracy from within. With the infatuation natural to weak minds he had gone on treating with contempt the warnings both of the more aged and prudent among his friends, as well as of GOD'S prophets. He had wilfully blinded his eyes to the dangers which, like a cloud though yet only the size of a man's hand, threatened shortly to darken the whole atmosphere of his earthly existence. At length the flood arose, and the stream beat vehemently against the fabric of his own, and his kingdom's safety. The shock which first showed decidedly that the breach had already commenced, appears to have happened on the day which had just opened upon him. An important crisis in Zedekiah's affairs had now arrived. The princes were to appear before him, for the purpose, as he well knew, of demanding the prophet's life at his hands.

It is doubtful to what amount the former acts of Zedekiah may have been virtually the acts of others, or in reality his own, suggested by his own heart and accomplished by his own choice. But it was now to be seen whether he still possessed the de-

gree of firmness requisite to enforce obedience to conscience in a matter of the highest moment, or whether he would suffer himself and his own convictions to be overborne by violent and ungodly advisers. Such is often a decisive and critical stage in the downward progress of unstable minds. As long as all that has been done, however self-condemned in its nature, be the fruit of our own act and will, there always appears to be humanly speaking a retreat and an escape open. We seem to have been our own masters in advancing—we suppose ourselves to be so still either for further advance or for return; and this notion whether a true one or not, will in a great measure prevent or retard a feeling of recklessness. Under a happy combination of circumstances it will often assist in bringing back the offender to better things. But once give ourselves up against our conscience into the hands of unprincipled companions, and we know not indeed where we may stop, or whether retreat will ever be possible. "His servants we are to whom we obey." Which of the two courses Zedekiah would choose, it was for this day to decide.

CHAPTER V.

"This people was placed as a light unto all the nations of the world besides: they enjoyed extraordinary prosperity that others might be allured to reverence them, and taste the goodness of their GOD; their unusual judgments and strange kind of afflictions were as so many proclamations unto the world, to beware of like rebellion; seeing all the world was set on wickedness, and GOD had appointed a day wherein He would judge the world in righteousness, necessary it was to set out a pattern of His mercy and justice in some people; and without wrong to any other, it was His especial favour to make choice of Abraham's seed for this purpose, on whom He showered His mercies in greatest abundance whilst they were obedient and faithful in the works of Abraham; but when they rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit, then He turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them, making them continual examples of his unpartial judgments."—Works of THOMAS JACKSON, D.D., sometime President of Corpus Christi Coll., Oxford, and Dean of Peterborough. Vol. I., c. 17, sect. 2, p. 124. Ed. 1844.

CHAPTER V.

"The heart that scorned a father's care,
How can it rise in filial prayer?
How an all-seeing Guardian bear?"
Christian Year. Trinity Sunday.

AFTER a restless and troubled night during which his eyes had scarcely been closed in slumber except at short and fitful intervals, Zedekiah arose. Instead of being refreshed by that "sweet sleep" which renews and recruits the strength of "the labouring man," Zedekiah's waking thoughts were rather haunted with the memory of harassing dreams. His frequent convulsive starts during the night, and his broken incoherent expressions, mingled with repeated mutterings of the prophet's name, had not escaped the notice of the queen his consort. What fresh occasion had arisen to give cause for such inward disquiet, she had not learnt, and to her questions anxiously demanded of him at their rising, he returned but hasty and evasive answers. He knew not yet his own weakness, nor had he the courage manfully to face the danger which was that day to meet him. Trusting to the result of fortuitous circumstances to rescue him from his difficulty, he had not dared to picture even

to himself the reality of that fall which was now awaiting him. Much less would he allow himself so openly to anticipate it as to impart his fears even to her whose fate was bound up with his own, and who would have to share the consequences of whatever he might now decide on. It is an unfavourable sign when from fear we hesitate to open our real state and intentions to those who are nearest and dearest to us. Truth and candour rather seek and court seasonable inquiry than shun it. And while in such a state of mind, seeing as he did guilt impending over him, though cherishing probably some vague hope of escaping it—such hope, however, if to be realised at all, yet not the fruit of any effort or resolution of his own, but simply to him the result of fortunate accident—how could he with such feelings commence the day by pouring out his heart before his Maker?—how could he sincerely pray for help to avoid that guilty act, which though he might possibly wish it had never met him, yet when met he had no settled intention of resisting? Prayers under such circumstances are rather the endeavour to hide ourselves from GOD, than to lay our hearts bare before him. They are an attempt like that of Ananias to gain the credit of an offering, at the same time keeping back part of the price. If the heart, therefore, feeling itself thus placed, prefer actually eluding the duty of prayer to incurring the guilt of conscious hypocrisy, can it be matter of surprise?*

* In illustration of the remarks contained in the text respecting an aversion to prayer caused by premeditated or unre-

Very similar to this was the unhappy condition in which Zedekiah found himself on the morning of that day. Accordingly hurrying away as well for the sake of avoiding any further inquiries from the queen, as for the purpose of obtaining in the society of his accustomed counsellors some respite from inward trouble, not even stopping to bestow a father's morning salutation on his youthful family, he left the sleeping apartment, and sought the refreshing morning breezes in the shady gardens of the palace.

There Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, one of the king's household, was quickly in attendance on his royal master. The inward anxiety which betrayed itself in the king's countenance soon caught his watchful eye, nor was he at a loss to conjecture the cause of it. Himself strongly inclined to follow the prophet's advice he had often endeavoured to influence Zedekiah's mind in his favour, and he now once more made an attempt of the same kind. But there was unfortunately every element at

pented guilt, the following quotation may be appropriately cited:—"While a man has ignorance or surprise to plead in excuse for himself, his heart may still be right with GOD, but when he wilfully and presumptuously offends, it is very plain that his heart is then alienated. * * * * He henceforth contracts a strange aversion to Him (whom he has offended), he is afraid to approach Him, conscious to himself that he has been acting treacherously, nay, perhaps strongly inclined, if not resolved even to do so again; *at least not fully resolved against it, he has therefore little or no heart to pray to God.*"—WATERLAND, *Sermon II., on Presumptuous Sin.* Vol. IX., p. 155.

present wanting in the king's breast, which would have enabled him to come to any firm resolution. Ebedmelech, however, suffered himself not to be discouraged while there was a ray of hope left. Though not himself one of the chosen people, but sprung from a foreign and despised nation, he was notwithstanding one of the few who had now the courage and piety to offer sound and godly counsel to their sovereign. Whether brought up from a child among the king's household attendants, or, having come from his own country at a more advanced age; in either case it is an honour to him that he appears to have availed himself of the advantages which circumstances offered him. He saw around him what was sufficient to convince any candid mind by the aid of reason only, that here amid the people of Israel was the knowledge of the true GOD. For who else but He that created the heavens and formed the earth could now govern His creatures as the LORD JEHOVAH did govern Israel? By many signs He openly proved Himself their governor. For had He not declared from ancient time what should happen? Had He not shown things that were to come hereafter, even from the beginning had declared them, that men might know them, and before-time that they might say "He is the righteous One;" who else but the true GOD could do such things?* "Of a truth it is that your GOD is a GOD of gods, and a LORD of kings," said the proud monarch of Babylon,

* See Isaiah xlv. 51, and xli. 26.

ISAIAH. SEE PAGE 54.

astounded at the wonderful powers granted to the messengers and prophets of the LORD JEHOVAH. Would that such a reasonable and right conviction had but lasted, and led, not only in his case but in that of others, to its proper results. Then indeed, might the boldest flights of the prophetic spirit have been long ago accomplished, "that the earth should be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."

That such glorious events did not happen in those ages seems at least to have been from no want of providential interposition. There is a limit beyond which even reason tells us that to expect divine interposition would be to expect that the whole system of this world should be changed. But within that limit all seems to have been done that could have been done. A nation gathered out from among the best known portion of the ancient civilized world, rescued from the power of that people who had enslaved and oppressed them, rescued by the mightiest and most awakening miracles, carried on dry land through the paths of the ocean's bed, planted in another land, that land the very centre * as it were of the then inhabited globe, whither moreover their terror and their report had gone before them, the terror, that is, of their GOD, for they were known themselves to be but a feeble people, only yesterday the slaves of

* "Thus saith the LORD GOD, This is Jerusalem, I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her."—Ezek. v. 5. See also Deut. xxxii. 8.

foreign masters—these ransomed captives thus brought, with mighty signs and wonders accompanying them, to a land possessed by warlike and powerful nations—a people strong and mighty with cities fenced up to heaven, such nations falling one by one before them, swept from the face of the earth "as the ox licketh up the grass"—the kingdom of the strangers thus established in their place—girt about forthwith as it were with a wall of fire, lest when once established their hostile neighbours should injure them—the eyes of all the surrounding countries involuntarily turned towards them, and gazing in mute astonishment at what was come to pass in the earth—these same people in succeeding generations, even when for their chastisement allowed to be vanquished by foreign princes, yet compelling those princes to respect them in their bonds, and to own their religion to be the only true one, their GOD to be the GOD of gods—all this done, and known, and seen, and published through the length and breadth of the world, as well by miraculous interposition as by the decrees of the mightiest princes, circulated through every people, nation, and language of their dominions;* and then can it be asked, what evidence was there, what providential means ever put in action for the diffusion and manifestation of the truth? Was there in this wide-spread report, no clue for the inquiring mind to seize upon, no thread by which to commence unravelling the labyrinth

* See Daniel iii. 29, and vi. 25.

of human error? Undoubtedly there was, and who shall say how many thousands there may have been, who, even among nations reputed to have been heathen, bowed not the knee, like their brethren, to the work of their own hands, but worshipped the one GOD in spirit and in truth? "The secret things belong unto the LORD;" but this we may fairly assume, that had but the Jewish nation done their intended duty and part in forwarding the work of GOD by making their example as conspicuous for piety and holiness as they themselves were made conspicuous for the possession both of divine truth and divine protection, then results of the most extensive and most happy kind might in all reason have been expected to follow.*

In the infancy of the human mind,—and an infancy of the whole race of man, considered as rational and intellectual beings, there appears upon consideration to have been, as well as in the case of every single and separate nation,—in such a state of infancy, to have had before the eyes of men an example of a people thus especially taken under the Divine government, in order to act as depositaries, voluntary or involuntary, of GOD's commands and of His recorded designs for future generations—and themselves to be in their national capacity either punished or rewarded respectively, either blessed with outward prosperity or chastened by temporal punishment in the exact and justest proportion to their national obedience;—such must

* See note at the end of this chapter.

have been a spectacle and a proof both most aptly suited to the hitherto inexperienced state of the moral world, and most wisely calculated to awaken due attention in all minds. And the attention once awakened, once rightly directed, truth need not long have been wanting. That such was at least some part of the destined lot and duty of the nation to whom the "oracles of GOD were committed," who would venture to deny? And if so, was not the neglect of it one of their national offences? There are sins of omission, as well as the more glaring class of positive transgressions; and for the one no less than for the other class there appears to be but in common justice a due recompense at the hands of "the righteous Judge of all the earth."

The few instances which have been recorded of such happy effects occurring, happened, it is to be feared, rather in spite of, than owing to, the endeavours of those through whose instrumentality they were produced. Yet, few as they were, they warrant us in believing that fruits the same in kind, but far more abundant in measure, might have been justly looked for by the LORD of the spiritual harvest, after His having scattered so bountifully the good seed, and guided all so providentially for its increase. A favourable specimen of what might have been generally expected is presented to us in the particular instance of Ebedmelech. By birth, an heir of that curse which was laid on the posterity of Ham—by circumstances, a slave, and so a victim of the most cruel indignities incidental to

Oriental servitude—yet his connection with the chosen people of GOD had been the means of placing within his reach blessings that far more than compensated for all these disadvantages of his unfavourable origin.* And neither had he failed to avail himself of the opportunities thus offered to him, nor had his efforts been unnoticed. Truly GOD is no respecter of persons. He may, and undoubtedly does, in His treatment of us, as members of a nation, see cause sometimes to punish the innocent with the guilty—if innocent, indeed, even in this sense, any can be called; but the examples of His particular providence, even in cases of temporal punishment, can leave us in no doubt that in the end we shall see the righteous judgment of the LORD. In every nation he that feareth Him is accepted with Him; but whosoever does fear Him must act up to the means of knowledge and of grace vouchsafed for his guidance. And so we have the best reason to believe Ebed-melech did. He had probably seen both the fulfilment of many former prophecies and also the fate of those who had despised them. He had laid up these things in his heart; and while others mocked and insulted GOD'S prophets, he honoured them. While others, in spite of the open denunciation pronounced in their hearing upon such conduct, continued to put their trust in man, and make flesh their arm,† he, on the contrary, steadfastly placed his trust in the LORD.‡

* See Isaiah lvi. 4 and 5. † Jer. xvii. 5. ‡ Jer. xxxix. 18.

The mild suggestions of Ebedmelech in favour of Jeremiah were listened to by his master with mingled feelings of pleasure and fear—pleasure at finding that one, whose virtues commanded silent respect, should agree in opinions and wishes with him—fear, lest this additional testimony to the plain dictates of conscience should stain with deeper guilt that deviation from them which inward weakness already foretold. As the two figures, the king and his faithful counsellor, were seen standing together, or at intervals pacing along the spacious and shady terraces of the royal palace, which Solomon, in the days of Judah's glory had built—Ebedmelech anxiously watching the countenance of his sovereign, suggesting from time to time with careful judgment each topic that appeared likely to turn the scale of judgment in favour of truth and justice,—what heart-stirring reflections might have occurred to the mind of a spectator at that strange sight!—the servant not seeking to be as his master, but striving that his master should be as he—that master meanwhile unable to deny the wisdom and justice of his servant's wish—the servant not receiving "a divine sentence from the lips of the king,"* but giving or offering on his part pious and godly counsel to his monarch—he who was appointed from his forefathers to be "a servant of servants"† to his brethren, now rising, in all things except external power, superior to every weight of circumstances that could oppress

* Prov. xvi. 10. † Gen. ix. 25.

him, and, but for evil influences elsewhere, guiding worthily and successfully the hand which, though the last of its race, still wielded the sceptre of the royal line of Judah. A prophetic eye might from that morning's scene have caught glimpses of future destiny. It might have foreseen the beginnings of that mighty change which was to take place in the circumstances of the two then existing divisions of mankind, the covenanted and the aliens; and in the persons of those two figures then standing together might have beheld types of the respective conditions of those two classes, to be accomplished in due course of time, when that heavy sentence should be pronounced and fulfilled, "The kingdom of GOD shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."*

* S. Matt. xxi. 43.

NOTE.—"All this while the rest of the world reap almost the same benefit by them, whether they keep their law and prosper, or disobey it and are in distress. One would naturally suppose that they must partake of the improvements of the Jews' religion in some degree, as well as these partook of their corruptions; and this appears to be the case in fact; and as it has been observed of Greece, that when it was subdued by the Romans, itself subdued its conquerors, softened their savage temper, and refined their manners;—and afterwards of the Romans themselves, that wherever they conquered, they civilised the world; so may it, with much greater justice be said of the Jews, that they improved and reformed the religion of every people, who were either brought into subjection to them

or into whose hands they fell; who were witnesses of the power and justice of their GOD, either in distinguishing them by rewards, for their adhering to Him, or as remarkably punishing them for deserting Him, and who seemed to be well acquainted with the intent of these His dispensations, especially when they were made the instruments thereof.

"Thus by the various revolutions in their government and frequent change of their condition, they spread the knowledge of their history and religion far and near; more especially by the total dispersion of the ten tribes, and the great captivity of Judah under the Assyrians and Babylonians; when by their cleaving more steadfastly to GOD, and refusing to comply with the idolatrous worship of the empire, they were distinguished by many extraordinary interpositions of Providence, and had several royal proclamations and public decrees made in their favour, which bore testimony to the supreme power, wisdom, and justice of their GOD. * * * Philadelphus, the son of Ptolemy, procured a translation of their law into Greek, the then most universal language; which was, as it were, a new publication of their religion. * * * His successor, Euergetes, offered sacrifices, and gave thanks to the GOD of Israel for all his victories, having seen the prophecies of Daniel concerning them; and being convinced that he owed them only to that GOD whose prophet had so fully predicted them. Ptolemy Philometor had a comment on the five books of Moses, dedicated to him by his preceptor; and permitted Onias, the high priest, to build a temple in his kingdom after the model of that at Jerusalem, and to perform the same worship in it; whereby the prophecy of Isaiah was, perhaps, fulfilled, 'That there should be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt,' and by this means His name became as well known there as in Judea itself, that temple continuing above 340 years. When at length Judea was reduced to a Roman province, this people and their religion became no less known over all that vast empire. * * * Thus did the four great successive monarchies severally contribute towards propagating the knowledge of the true GOD in the world. Thus, as the last of His prophets had foretold, 'from the rising

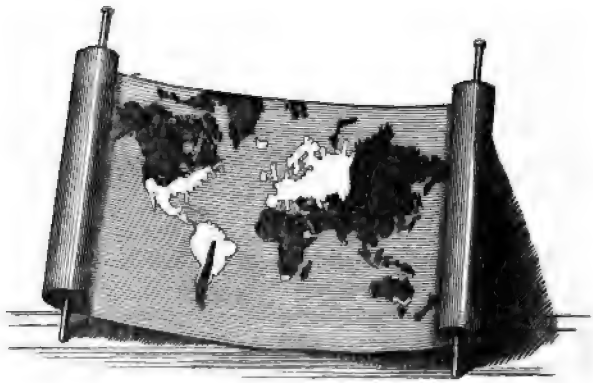
of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, was His name great among the Gentiles.' And though the Jews were never able to convert a whole nation to their Church, and make it the established religion of the country, yet they gained everywhere numerous proselytes to their law, and many more to the belief of one Supreme GOD; * * * and thereby prepared the minds of men for a more perfect dispensation; *and might have done this with still better success had they acted more conformably to the genius of their own institutions, and not treated all others with so much pride, and ill nature, as often rendered themselves odious and contemptible to them, especially in the latter ages of their government.* * * *

"Besides, the Jewish prophets were often despatched to foreign countries to acquaint them with the counsels of the Most High, and to make them *know the* LORD. Jeremiah was ordained a prophet unto the nations, who, together with Isaiah and Ezekiel, prophesied to most of them. * * * And thus did this famous people every way conduce to propagate the knowledge and fear of the one true GOD in almost every nation, either by their prosperity or adversity, their conquests or captivities, their separation from the rest of the nations, or their dispersion among them, both by the laws that were given them and by the prophets which at various times were raised up in the midst of them, proclaiming the power and justice of the universal Governor of the world, and foretelling His disposal both of them and the neighbouring states, together with the reasons of it.

"Thus were mankind far from being rejected by their Maker during this state of nonage, though He had His peculiar residence among the Jews, and was their visible guardian and director. The express terms of His covenant, indeed, belonged to them (which, as it consisted in temporal things, He was often obliged to interpose to make good the performance of it; and which, on that very account, could not be a more perfect one), the real benefits thereof, the Heavenly Canaan, of which the first may be conceived as only a type or shadow, extended 'to the people of every nation that feared GOD and worked

righteousness'—and He might fix His residence in Jewry, as being in the midst of the nations, in order to dispense the rays of His light more equally and advantageously among them, to whom His chosen people probably were designed to bear a due proportion, as some understand those words of Deuteronomy xxxii. 8, 'He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the people of Israel.'"—LAW's *Considerations on the Theory of Religion*, p. 84.

It can hardly be necessary to observe how completely the principle implied in the above remarks is applicable after making due allowance for change of time and circumstances to Christendom generally at the present day, surrounded as it is even at this advanced period of the world's age, with nations of heathens and unbelievers. And if to Christendom generally, is it not applicable to England in a particular and especial manner, holding, as she does, from Him "who ruleth in the kingdom of men," the sceptre of the ocean in one hand, and in the other as a true branch of CHRIST'S Apostolic Church, the open volume of GOD'S revealed word?



CHRISTIANS.....	260,000,000
UNBELIEVERS.....	600,000,000
TOTAL POPULATION OF THE WORLD	860,000,000

CHAPTER VI.

"The solemn visible sacrifices, when instituted by the command of Him, the great Invisible, are to be presented by every pious person, with an humble and obedient regard; yet the chief labour is to be employed on the pure sublime worship and obedience of the mind. * * * Even in the Jewish Church, while the obligation to sacrifice did yet continue with all the laborious institution of external worship, holiness, and righteousness, and integrity of heart and life, were acknowledged to be the most essential parts of religion, though, alas! while all confessed it in words, there were very few that set themselves seriously to perform it. * * * Since the Temple has been demolished, and the priests with their sacrifices have ceased, the Jews themselves have instituted, in the place of this, the offering of the lip with the commemoration only of ancient sacrifice, persuaded that this would be equally effectual; and have appointed three daily lessons, calling him who diligently recites them a son of eternal life."—LEIGHTON'S *Meditations on Psalm IV.*

CHAPTER VI.

"Next came one
Who mourned in earnest when the captive ark
Maimed his brute image, head and hands lopped off
In his own temple, on the grunsel edge,
Where he fell flat and shamed his worshippers:
Dagon his name, sea-monster, upwards man
And downward fish; yet had his temple high
Reared in Azotus, dreaded through the coast
Of Palestine, in Gath, and Ascalon,
And Accaron and Gaza's frontier bounds."

Paradise Lost, Book I.

THE king was now joined by Seraiah the high priest. After the usual salutation and obeisance had been made, Seraiah quickly commenced the conversation, suspecting, from Ebedmelech having been seen in close communication with his royal master, and from the king's own agitated and anxious looks, that the counsels of the princes were not altogether in harmony with the king's present intentions. "Will my lord the king," said Seraiah, "be prepared this day to receive the proposals of his faithful counsellors, and to stop the further mischief which is daily done by the mad

prophet of Anathoth? Too long has he discouraged and disheartened the minds of our brave citizens; and by his idle visions and parables has disturbed the plans which we had devised for the safety of our sovereign and our country."

The last few words seemed to offer Zedekiah an opportunity of changing the subject for a while, and of turning the turbid current of his thoughts into another though scarcely less rugged and broken channel. "What tidings," asked the king, "does this morning bring of our own brave warriors and soldiers; and what of our foes? Does the proud Babylonian still trust that his war-engines and his embankments shall prevail against the lofty bulwarks of the city of David? or does he hope that his profane and heathen multitude shall be allowed the mastery over the chosen, the heaven-defended people of Judah? But what new plans has he put in motion against us? The captain of our hosts has doubtless given you the latest tidings for your sovereign's ears." While Zedekiah's heart but faintly echoed back these boastful expressions, which his tongue had rather learnt from the infatuated courtiers that usually surrounded him, than had uttered from any conviction of his own, Seraiah promptly took up the thread of the discourse and replied: "No change since the last tidings brought to my lord the king, has occurred, or his servants would have duly apprised their lord of it. The Babylonian is still wasting his strength and the lives of his heathen subjects beneath our walls. A few suns more will

doubtless see the scattered remnant of his hosts flying before our own and our allies' combined attacks. Our Egyptian confederates are waiting only till time shall have exhausted the energies, and till security shall have lulled to sleep the vigilance of our besiegers, to fall upon them as the eagle on his prey. So, too, speak the seers, those at least of them whose minds have not yet been perverted by cowardice or treachery. As for that blind enthusiast and recreant, who was only prevented from falling away to our enemies by the watchfulness of the brave Irijah,* and who, even from his prison, dares still to send forth the seditious poison of his so-styled prophecies, let his blood be upon the heads of my lord the king's servants, and this day shall be the last of his uttering his burdens† and complainings. As for the truth or consistency of his pretended prophecies, what reliance can be placed on them, when his own acts contradict them? Has the report reached the ears of my lord the king, concerning the dreamer's crafty bargaining with Hanameel, the son of his uncle Shallum, for a parcel of land in Anathoth, his native village?"

"Sayest thou this of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah?" asked the king. "Of none other than him, my lord," replied Seraiah. "Who else but he so mad as to make his own actions falsify his words? Yet he is still daily uttering his forebodings that Jerusalem shall be taken; that the

* Jer. xxxvii. 13. † See Jer. xxiii. 33, 34.

Chaldeans shall destroy with fire and sword our ancient city; that the children of Judah shall be slain or carried away captives; and that the land shall be desolate. Does he not take us for idiots, that he would have us believe these his vain fancies, and yet, in the midst of uttering them, nay, almost with the same breath, he invites witnesses to bear testimony to his purchase of the very land that is to lie desolate? And can my lord the king be yet doubtful about the character of one who thus proclaimeth his own shame?"

"Before what witnesses," again asked Zedekiah, "was so strange a deed transacted?" "Even before Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah," was the reply, "and before all the Jews who sat in the court of the prison.* Nor was he satisfied with the evidence of mere ocular witness. The writings, even the sealed and the open writings, were both duly subscribed, and the price in full weight delivered over before many spectators. Can my lord need further proof of his self-convicted folly? And shall such a one be allowed to blast and mar all our attempts to preserve our city, and to repel these heathen spoilers from our gates? For so he does at present mar them. The giddy, ignorant rabble still listen to his mad ravings. Some are yet idle enough to regard him as a true prophet, and, but for the efforts of our bold patriots, would probably follow his accursed counsel, and give themselves up as slaves to the Babylonians. The

* Jer. xxxii. 7—15.

sword and the pestilence have already relieved us of many such useless burdens, and may they still continue to do so. The forefront of the battle shall not be wanting in assisting to rid us of them if Seraiah has any influence in the council of the princes. And so let all the enemies of my lord the king, perish and be confounded."

The heat of conversation, and the impetuosity of a mind unbridled by any feelings of humanity or piety had betrayed the usually cautious leader of his party, intent as he was then upon a scheme of cruelty and sacrilege, rather beyond the limits of his accustomed prudence. He had allowed himself, unguardedly, to touch upon more than one subject, which he had hitherto endeavoured to keep strictly concealed from the king's knowledge. The ravages which the famine and the pestilence were fast making in the lower ranks of the people, as might naturally have been expected after a siege of nearly eighteen months' duration—the profligate disregard of life and justice shown by the soldiery and their leaders in the treatment of their helpless fellow-citizens—the cruelty exercised in examining, by torture, any who were supposed to have secreted the smallest quantity of provisions*—all these were points which Seraiah had unintentionally, in the indiscriminate zeal with which he had been urging the object of his present endeavours, allowed to escape his lips, although only in the way of transient and indirect allusion.

* See Josephus. Wars of the Jews, Book VI.

While his last words were being uttered, in which he reproached with a charge of abject cowardice those, who would, in obedience to the prophet, have surrendered themselves to the besiegers, a look of mingled scorn and hatred might have been observed to pass rapidly over his features, as his eyes met those of the third person in that group, the faithful Ebedmelech. Among the number of those whom he had so bitterly reviled as listeners to the prophet's words, each of the two whose looks then encountered those of the other, was inwardly conscious that one then present was intended. But the king's personal attendant stood too safely sheltered under the protection of the royal favour to be attacked without danger of wounding his master.

On the present occasion, however, the accusation might have been made even more boldly without being perceived by the king. For the latter part of Seraiah's words had been wholly lost upon one of his hearers. A chord had been inadvertently touched by the speaker, to which every feeling in the mind of Zedekiah vibrated with fearful rapidity. The mention of the covenant, the witnesses, the evidence, which, in speaking of Jeremiah's purchase of land, Seraiah had dwelt upon rather at length, suggested a subject likely enough, as the event proved, to bring back to Zedekiah's memory a scene of somewhat similar nature in which he had been most nearly concerned. He could not forget that the throne, upon which he sat, had been transferred from his brother to himself upon the

condition of a strict oath being taken on his part to which the very men, who now stood by him, had themselves been witnesses. The day was yet fresh in his memory on which he had solemnly pledged himself before the Babylonian monarch, and before the princes of his own people, to pay tribute and fealty to him by whose permission he was then to ascend the throne, from which his brother, for rebellion, had been cast out. The sacred name of the GOD of Israel had been invoked, that name for which the LORD had so often declared by His prophets, that "He had wrought that it should not be polluted among the Gentiles,"—that "glorious and fearful name,"* which, from the days of Moses, they had been commanded, at the risk of the heaviest penalties, to respect and reverence,—even this name had been the witness, as Zedekiah well remembered, of his covenant, (alas! how soon despised) with the king of Babylon. And at the very mention of a covenant, the recollection of that day seemed to start into fresh being, arrayed by the hand of conscience in the most vivid colours.

His own name too, as often as he heard it pronounced, sounded ominous; as often as he traced its signature on the writing tables he seemed to himself to be ratifying the sentence of his own guilt, and the warrant for his punishment. For the conqueror, in giving him his brother's throne, had not forgotten to give him with it a new name, calculated to remind him of the tenure by which

* Deut. xxviii. 58.

he was henceforth to possess the seat of government in Jerusalem. Instead of Mattaniah, he was hereafter to be known by the significant title of Zedekiah, or the "Justice of GOD."

"And if He be a GOD of justice," said the unhappy king within himself, "in what condition am I? A 'covenant breaker,' a—" * * *

As he thus inwardly anticipated in anguish of heart his own fast-approaching fate, the closing words of Seraiah's address to him caught his ear, and interrupted the further progress of his own bitter reflections. "So let all the enemies of my lord the king perish and be confounded," were the words that first recalled him from his short interval of mental absence, which, as it had been involuntary on his own part, so also had been unperceived by the two who then stood in his presence. "How perish?" he exclaimed, starting as from a dream—"who has perished? Is it the prophet the son of Hilkiah? Who has dared, without the king's command, to take his life? Say, who is it that hath done this thing? As the LORD liveth, he shall surely die." Suddenly aroused again to consciousness, the first idea that suggested itself to Zedekiah's troubled mind on catching as he did the above words, was that the very deed had been already done which his anxious fears had so long been brooding over and studying how to prevent. The words which he heard were naturally at the spur of the moment, connected with him of whom Seraiah had been speaking, up to the time that the king's attention had followed his discourse, and he

was startled at the supposed fact of that being already accomplished, to which nevertheless another hour was destined to see him, however unwillingly, yet finally consenting. "I spake not of that dreamer," replied Seraiah, promptly. "He is still safe till the sentence of my lord the king shall have awarded him the due recompense of that cowardice and treachery which are only equalled by the folly and inconsistency of his conduct. If my lord the king seeks to be guided by the advice of prophets, have we not prophets and seers among us far more reasonable than he? Have we not moreover the concurring testimony of the prophets who are among our brethren now at Babylon? And have they not promised us speedy delivery from our foes? And did not Shemaiah the Nehelamite* long ago, after foretelling our safety, counsel us to cast into prison this impostor, the son of Hilkiah?" "True," said the king, pondering silently with himself for a few moments; "now thou remindest me of the fact, Seraiah, it was from Babylon, too, that we received that prediction, so contrary to the threats of this Jeremiah, declaring clearly that I should never see the city of the Babylonian monarch. It came, too, from one, even Ezekiel, the priest, the son of Buzi, the truth of whose sayings the son of Hilkiah so warmly defends. Yet how often has this same Jeremiah denounced captivity on our city and on me its sovereign—captivity and chains even in the proud Babylon itself! Seraiah, thou art right,

* Jer. xxix. 24.

Such contradictions savour but too surely of deceit and bear but little even of the appearance of truth upon them.* Our counsels shall even yet prosper, and our foes be confounded. Greater dangers than the present have in former days threatened our country, yet still we have been preserved. GOD will not give up His chosen people to be the prey of these proud heathen spoilers. Our bulwarks shall yet be found proof against their vain attempts."

"The king's words are life and health to his servant," said the wily Seraiah, who observed that the mind of his royal master was at last falling into the train of thought most suitable to his designs. He lost not, therefore, the opportunity, but quickly fanned the flame of national pride and overweening confidence, which, like the treacherous mirage of the desert, had long deluded the sight of both king and nobles in the devoted city of David. He threw himself at once into the king's suggestions, and repeating his concluding words, replied, "Not only are our bulwarks safe, as my lord the king has said, but also the temple of the LORD OF HOSTS—that temple whose glories these proud Assyrians have in vain attempted to rival. Under its shadow we will yet hope for safety and deliverance. The sacred treasures and vessels which these despisers have robbed us of shall doubtless be restored uninjured, according to the words of our prophets. For had the Chaldean dared to profane them with im-

* See Josephus. Antiquities, Book X. c. 11.

THE FALL OF DAGON. SEE PAGE 77.

pious hands, it should assuredly have happened to him, as it befel the Philistine god, Dagon of old, when the ark of GOD approached his temple. No, by such signs, our GOD would have us no longer fear that our enemies shall triumph over us. His seat is in His Temple here among us, and He will not desert it.* No hand of violence has been allowed by Him to assail its true and richest treasures. Its two pillars of brass—the wonder of all spectators—still proudly tower aloft in front of its spacious porch. The brazen sea, wrought by Tyrian art in the days of our great King Solomon, still rests firm as the Temple itself on its twelve noble supporters—emblems, like their living counterparts, of our nation's strength and endurance. And the ark, that wonder-working token of our national power, at which the very waters of Jordan arrested their course to give the chosen nation of Israel a passage to our promised land, and to do honour to the LORD'S people, that is still our own, with its holy treasures still unhurt within it; and, lastly, that glorious manifestation of the Divine presence, abiding, as it ever has done, between the cherubims, brighter even than the flame of that heaven-descended fire which yet burns upon our altars—all these are still our own; and shall they be given, as that profane mocker has blasphemously threatened, to the destroyer and the spoiler? Sooner shall yon unclouded sun, which shines above us, be darkened and blotted out from the fair face

* See Micah iii. 11. † Lev. ix. 24.

of creation—sooner shall the waters of Jordan flow backwards and deluge the snowy summits of Lebanon, sweeping from its sides the forests of stately cedars which engirdle it—sooner shall the GOD of Heaven forget His everlasting covenant of day and night, of summer and winter, of seed-time and harvest, than forsake Mount Sion, which He hath chosen for Himself, and the glorious Temple, which He commanded to be built for His habitation."

So blindly does the infatuated mind of man trust to preserving supposed rights and privileges, after all that was the cause of those privileges being first bestowed and subsequently continued, has ceased to exist; nay, probably, has been cast away in scorn by the very persons who now claim such privileges. So easily and stealthily, when it suits his purpose, can the spiritual adversary of man suggest from within the scoffer's deceitful argument that "all things shall continue as they were." "Willingly ignorant" they may indeed be termed, who suffer themselves to become the victims of such a delusion. Warnings, threats, examples, promises, seem to fall alike, in vain, on a mind so circumstanced. They are but as the early and the latter rain when they fall upon the barren rock, having power indeed to fertilize, but meeting with no soil or seed to benefit by their genial influence. How many instances of the kind does history record for our instruction. Nations tottering under the weight of institutions unnatural in themselves, and no longer even palliated by the reasons, moral or physical, which first led to their intro-

duction, have gone on to the very brink of the fearful gulf of anarchy, while their rulers have been wholly unconscious whither the next step would conduct them. Customs, either perverted from their legitimate purposes, or grown to abusive excess, or probably from their commencement pernicious, and contrary to the dictates of the divine law, have continued in use till, in the diseased state of mind which they themselves have contributed to produce, they have appeared invested with all the strength, and entitled to claim the very attributes of the unalterable laws of nature. Thus the evil continually gaining fresh power and virulence, grows up by degrees to a fatal height, and the crisis bursts at length by surprise upon its unprepared and heedless victims.

And if such a case can happen, as it has often done, in matters which concern our temporal condition, and where, in our capacity of children of this world, we may be supposed to possess a clearer discernment of our welfare, how much more so in our capacity of children of light. Here, if the eye be not single the whole body is full of darkness; nay, the very light that is in us may become darkness. We are not simply left without a guide, but have unconsciously become subject to the directions of a false and treacherous one. We have put bitter for sweet till our senses, having contracted a false and deceitful bias, can no longer discern between good and evil.

To such visitations of retributive justice upon guilty habits, arising either from wilful ignorance,

or groundless prejudice, or whatever other cause, nations seem, from experience, to be as fully liable as individuals. Such had become, more so probably than ever before in their history, the case of the Jewish nation in the reigns of Zedekiah and his elder brother. In vain had prophet after prophet, accredited by the surest proofs of their authority, proclaimed aloud by their words in the gates of Jerusalem, and denounced in public as well as private, by their miracles, and by the oriental custom of emblematic actions, that GOD, for their rebellion, was ready to cast them off from His favour and protection. In vain did they point to the fate of the rebellious sister of Jerusalem, the fallen Samaria, already gone into captivity with her children. "Aholah and Aholibah, those lewd women, being often reproved, hardened their necks," "nor would the younger be warned even by the punishment of the elder, nay, when she saw it, she became more corrupt in her inordinate love." Therefore was she at length sentenced to "drink of her sister's cup, deep and large, the cup of astonishment and desolation. Ye shall bear the sins of your idols."*

Seraiah, in speaking before his king, as he and many others had been long accustomed to do, with such presumptuous confidence in the continued safety of the city and temple, had no such ground to rest upon as that of obedience to the GOD, whose temple that was, or of pious submission to

* Ezekiel xxiii. 33.

His will, such as Hezekiah showed on a like occasion. Far from it. Neither Seraiah nor his confederates were willing to listen to any prophet when his predictions crossed their purposes, rather they suborned false prophets to delude a people too ready, even without encouragement, to receive fictions thus smooth and pleasant to their ears. Meanwhile they, as well as Seraiah, knew that of those false prophets who had risen up, the most bold and conspicuous had been successively arrested in their course by sudden and untimely death—death foretold and denounced upon them by the voice of the very man for whose destruction Seraiah was now so impiously plotting. Hananiah, the son of Azur, had foretold that the total overthrow of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, and the restoration of Jechoniah to his country should happen within two years. But within two months he himself, according to Jeremiah's denunciation, had for his rebellious teaching fallen a victim to the righteous judgment of that GOD whose name he had profaned. At Babylon, two others, Ahab, the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah, the son of Maaseiah had similarly dared to utter false predictions in GOD'S name. But with both it had fared agreeably to what had been generally foretold of all such pretenders from their first going to Babylon—they being put to a cruel death at the command of Nebuchadnezzar himself. And so notorious were these facts that it became proverbial as a curse, "the LORD make thee like Zedekiah, and like

Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire."*

Yet in the face of all such evidence, and all such warnings, "the prophets still prophesied falsely, and the priests bare rule by their means, and the people loved to have it so."

* Jer. xxix. 22.

CHAPTER VII.

"The prophets were teachers of righteousness to their own people; the sins which they reproved were the sins which they saw daily committed—the judgments which they threatened were the judgments which those sins would draw down; and as this part of their task was more addressed to their own generation than to after ages, so it is most useful to those times and those nations which are most like the times when the prophets lived and the state of the nation of Israel, to whom their word was spoken. Now I think that our times and our own nation more closely resemble the time of Isaiah's preaching, and the nation of Israel to whom he preached, than any other time or nation that could be named. The worship of GOD was established by law. * * * Israel, in the days of Isaiah, was full of great riches and great poverty—great covetousness and luxury, on one side, great misery and carelessness of GOD on the other. Who can look through this land at this moment, and not see the same state of things here? Israel, in the days of Isaiah, had those who measured things and actions not by the Word of GOD, but by the custom of men;—if practices were common and of long continuance, they were called by some honourable name, whether they were an abomination in the sight of GOD or no. So it is among us. * * * The prophets then are, in a most remarkable manner, the mirror or glass in which we may see our own likeness."—ARNOLD'S *Sermons*, XXIX. Vol. II.

CHAPTER VII.

"Ah! far removed from all that glads the sense,
From all that softens or ennobles man,
The wretched Many! Bent beneath their loads
They gape at pageant power, nor recognise
Their cot's transmuted plunder! From the tree
Of knowledge, ere the vernal sap had risen
Rudely disbranched."

COLERIDGE.
Juvenile Poems. Religious Musings.

WHILE Seraiah had been thus employed in preparing the king's mind for consenting to the iniquitous design which the princes in common with himself had concerted against Jeremiah, a different scene had been passing where those princes were assembled to wait the arrival of Zedekiah. In the eastern wall of the city, and nearly at its north-eastern angle stood the gate of Benjamin, so called from its leading into the country belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. There the king during the siege was wont to sit and administer justice, or at least to preside over the court in which such redress, as could in those times of oppression be

obtained, was to be sought. It was chosen at the present time as the seat of judgment on account probably of its commanding position, being situated on the steep precipitous brow of the hill which formed one side of the valley of Jehoshaphat. It was consequently difficult of approach for the enemy, and at the same time commanded a clear and neighbouring view of their encampment. Near the upper part of the same valley, and on the banks of the brook of Kedron they had entrenched themselves, and thus any movement of their main body could be at once observed from the tower of the gate of Benjamin. The tower itself formed a covered passage of some yards in length and width, through which the thoroughfare lay for persons leaving or entering the city in that direction. Massive gates and bars at each end of the gateway were prepared for closing the thoroughfare when necessary, and at each side of it, between the two pairs of gates, recesses offered a convenient space either for lodging the guard, or as on the present occasion for holding the public courts of justice.* A council room above served for the more private assemblies of the judges or officers connected with the gate, while on the outside a flight of stone steps led from the rampart to the flat roof of the tower where the watchman or archers took their stand in times of danger and attack.

Near this gate were now collected many of the poorer and distressed inhabitants of the city, hop-

* See Harmer's Observations, 37, Vol. III.

ing to be able to gain a hearing from the king as he sat in the seat of judgment, and to plead for redress at his hands for their several grievances. There were to be seen the wan faces of those whom the usurer's griping hand had stripped of every remnant of worldly substance, and had at last deprived even of the humble dwelling which had for generations been the inheritance of their forefathers. Many of them after having thus been rendered houseless and homeless had been thrust out to bear, as they could, the heat by day and the cold by night in the open streets of the city. The rites of the year of Jubile or restoration of such property to its original possessors had been long neglected, as had also been those of the Sabbatic or seventh year; and thus the unhappy outcasts saw no hope of recovering their lands or houses from the grasp of their obdurate oppressors. Field had still been added to field and house to house, with avarice as unfeeling towards their brethren as it was in open defiance of the commandments of their law.

Many little knots of such wretched and careworn victims of the extortioner were to be seen lingering about the gate of Benjamin as they had heard that the king was likely that day to take his seat in the hall of judgment. The unhappy cripple who in the vigour of youth had risked life and limb in defending his king and country from their foreign foes, but was now left maimed, disabled, and helpless by reason of his wounds, hoped to catch that day a look from his sovereign as he passed,

and to have his tale heard and his hardships relieved. The widowed mother who had seen the mangled corpses both of her husband and of her sons, "the desire of her eyes" brought in turn and laid at the door of her now desolate dwelling, and who had been left since then destitute, and without means of providing the veriest necessaries of life, she too hoped in common with the crippled soldier to present her petition, if it were but for a scanty dole of food at the king's gate.

Little heed was given by the haughty nobles as they in succession passed through the groups of the afflicted and distressed on their way to the gate of Benjamin. Their present errand was not one calculated to allow free play for the feelings of compassion and pity, even had such feelings found place at any time within them. As their eyes fell unavoidably upon some amid that group of sorrowing countenances, either conscience smote them as being themselves, in some degree, connected with the cause of such sorrow,—or the wicked thought suggested itself, "Would that so many useless beings were removed out of our way,—and so our scanty resources might hold out the longer against our enemies. Why preys the accursed pestilence upon our brave comrades in arms, while here is fitter food for its devouring ravages?"*

The unhappy beings, who were the subjects of such cruel and hard-hearted reflections, continued some sitting, some standing around the entrance of

* See Josephus. Wars of the Jews, Book VI. Chap. 10.

the porch of the gateway. In an angle formed by a projecting buttress, which sheltered them from the sun, sat two female figures in evident grief, and engaged in conversation apparently on the circumstances of their respective troubles. The one matronly in her appearance, and already past the vigour of her age, held in her arms an infant which, by its restlessness and frequent sobbings betrayed, even more clearly than by its emaciated looks, symptoms of inward distress and pain. Its pale thin face and stunted limbs told indeed, with fidelity more impressive, if possible, than did its mother's plaintive accents, the dismal tale of want, and need, and hunger. The glow of health seemed long to have forsaken that mother's hollow sunken cheeks—and around the eyeballs, which by the shrinking of the flesh already began to project unnaturally from their sockets, was observable a sallow dusky hue*—as though the veins had no longer even the thin texture of the skin to cover and protect them.

"Alas, alas! if my lord the king comes not quickly, I fear me, I have not strength to await his coming," said Rizpah, the elder of those two females, to her companion. "Patience," replied Hatipha, the younger: "it cannot be long ere he will arrive. The sun is already high in the heavens, —and the princes are here waiting the king's approach,—and have we not eaten the last morsel that remained to us? Shall we then go home to

* See Harmer's Observations, 215, Vol. IV. and Lam. v. 10.

die while there is yet bread in the city? Will not the blood of our kindred, who have been slain in fighting the king's battles, rise up in judgment against him if he deny our request?"

Little did Hatipha appreciate the weight of care and anxiety which presses on the shoulders of those who are placed in high and responsible stations of life. She fondly hoped that the king's mind would at once be interested in her tale of distress—that his attention would be immediately directed to it—and his sympathies aroused and enlisted in her cause. She remembered not the thousands of similar, nay, perhaps, even more aggravated cases of calamity which daily craved his hearing and his protection. The subject of her own grief, which naturally, for the present, engrossed all her thoughts, could not, she imagined, but appear arrayed in colours as strong and vivid to others, as it did to herself. But she was destined to have one more pang, that of disappointment in her hopes of redress, added to her already lengthened list of sorrows. These had been in themselves severe, and had left her—like a tree stripped to its very bark by the lightning's blast, bereaved at once of parents, home, and friends—an orphan, destitute and unprotected. One only brother, and two sisters, all still children, had been spared from the ravages of the sword or the pestilence. And they had now only her to look to for that protection which she so much needed for herself, and which she had been always accustomed to receive from the hands of kind and fond parents.

Her father's humble dwelling had been one of those nearest to the north wall of the city. It was upon this part of the fortifications that the enemy had made his most obstinate and repeated attacks —and consequently, not only had the battlements suffered chiefly in this quarter, but the houses also within them had been seriously injured by the huge stones and missiles thrown by the besiegers. When it was found necessary to repair these injuries done to the fortifications, the materials of the nearest houses were demanded for the work; for having been so seriously damaged as to be scarcely any longer available for dwellings, they were evidently on this account, as well as by their situation, the fittest for the purpose.* It was in one of these that Telzar, the father of Hatipha, had dwelt. Its neighbourhood to the fish-gate had made it the most convenient position for him, he and his sons, as well as his ancestors for many generations, having followed the trade of fishermen. Shortly after the death of her father, which happened, together with that of her two elder brothers, while they were making a sally upon the besiegers, Hatipha found herself abruptly and rudely torn from the dwelling in which her earlier years had been spent. Without consideration for her present helpless state, and with scarce any notice of their design, she was bidden by the voice of strangers to leave her only home, and to seek among her friends for some other abode. Her mother, who survived

* Isaiah xxii. 10.

not the combined shock of her sons' and her husband's death, had been spared this new affliction. For it would indeed have weighed heavily on her mind to have seen the peaceful dwelling, in which so many happy years had been spent, rent from her, and razed, as it now was, to the very ground.

Hatipha being thus deprived nearly at the same time both of home and parents, sought refuge, together with her younger brother and two orphan sisters, in the house of her cousin Rizpah. This was in the lower part of the town, towards the eastern extremity of the valley called Tyropæon, which ran almost the whole width of the city separating Mount Zion or the upper city from Acra or the lower. This was naturally a more sheltered situation, but it was densely peopled, and so by reason of its low and crowded state had been the most severely visited by the ravages of the prevailing pestilence. The multitudes who had flocked into Jerusalem as the Babylonians approached and destroyed their unprotected cities, had caused every room and tenement in the metropolis to be anxiously sought for and occupied. Rizpah however had received her houseless and orphan relatives, and had offered to share with them whatever accommodation it was in her power to afford. Hatipha on her part had been able at the time to add somewhat to Rizpah's stock of provisions, which were then daily becoming throughout the city more scarce and dear. She had brought with her a few bags of coarse meal, and some measures of unground corn which her father had purchased

at an earlier period of the siege by the sale of his fishing nets and other implements of his trade. By strict frugality and economy a portion of this little dearly-bought stock was remaining at his death, and had at Hatipha's removal from her home been transferred with her to the dwelling of Rizpah. It had not, however, escaped the notice of the unfeeling soldiers who had watched her as she was departing at their command from her former dwelling, and who were waiting only for her to cross the threshold before they completed the demolition of its walls. Whatever they could they seized on at the moment—the very wood from the doors and beams of her father's house, had been denied her, though fuel was now, like many other of the commonest necessaries of life, so nearly exhausted that few persons could any longer enjoy the luxury of a meal prepared or dressed by fire.

Not many days after her removal some loud and boisterous voices, accompanied by a ringing sound of sword and spear, were heard in the porch and inner court of the house where Rizpah dwelt, inquiring for the daughter of Telzar the fisherman. Having found her, they rudely demanded that her brother should be at once given up to them. It was the king's command, they pretended, that all boys should be sought for and made useful in assisting and attending upon those who were defending the walls. This was a new affliction for Hatipha, but, like others before it, unavoidable. In vain she appealed alike to their pity and to their reason. "Of what service," she inquired, "could

a mere child be to them? Her elder brothers too had both fallen in the war. Would they not leave this one, now the only survivor, and him so young, to be her companion, at least for the present?"

"Delay us no longer," cried the leader of the party. "Shall we tarry here all day wrangling for a stripling? away with him to the guard-room, comrades. And now, woman, haste thee, and produce quickly some portion of your hoards of corn and meal. You shall have an opportunity of showing your love for the boy in this way." It was this indeed, which had been their real object from the first, though disguised under the above pretence. It was to no purpose that Rizpah now added her entreaties to those of Hatipha. "She and her children," she reminded them, "as well as her orphan relatives had now no other resources left but what little was with them in the house, and even this, if the war continued, must be speedily exhausted."

While she was thus endeavouring to move the pity of the leader, his companions were searching greedily for the booty. Having secured the greater part of the little stock which a few days before they had seen removed from Telzar's dwelling, they departed dragging with them the weeping and terrified boy who had been the pretended object of their visit. To add further bitterness to the deed, a threat was muttered in parting that they would return again when this supply was exhausted, for no doubt they should find more concealed and hoarded than they had yet discovered. It was in

order to gain redress for these her grievances, and to solicit from the king that in consideration of the loss of her father and brothers in the war, some allowance of food should be given her from the public stores, that Hatipha now waited for Zedekiah as he was about to take his seat in the gate of judgment.

Rizpah too had had her trials and had come now not for the first time, though for the same purpose as Hatipha, to seek justice and redress at the king's hands. Her father, the old Elcazar, had succeeded at the very close of a life of frugal industry in enabling himself to purchase what had for many years been the object and aim of his warmest wishes, a small vineyard at Beth-haccerem, near Tekoa. Beth-haccerem was a humble village in the mountainous part of Judea, a few miles south of Jerusalem. The neighbourhood was celebrated for its vineyards, and as the family of Elcazar had for many generations followed the occupation of vine-dressers, it was here that their employment had naturally caused them to spend much of their time. The original inheritance of Elcazar's ancestors, when the land was divided according to the families, had been here, and this alone formed a bond of attachment to the spot stronger than any which mere accidental circumstances could have supplied. But among the degenerate customs which had gradually crept in, and been fostered by the avarice of the great and by indifference to the divine law among all classes, was the neglect of the observances belonging to the year of Jubile. The powerful and

wealthy had consequently gone on increasing their possessions, till almost all the land had, contrary to the express commands of their inspired legislator, been alienated from the poor, and no restoration of it, as had been intended at the close of each generation or period of fifty years, had now for a long time taken place. It was hardly to be expected on the part of the humbler classes that they who had forgotten and transgressed the divine precepts in so many other instances, should have either recollected, or been able to enforce them, in the one particular case which would have been so much to their own comfort, and worldly advantage. Nor would the wealthy and covetous have been likely, amid the general neglect of GOD'S law, to have listened to a claim, even if urged, which was so feebly supported by consistency in the observance of other precepts. So frequently does it happen, by the direction of a wise Providence, that godless and negligent habits in one branch of duty should even during this life, meet with their due recompense in the loss of some corresponding privilege or enjoyment.

To assist him in his labours in the vineyard, and also in discharge of his duty as nearest kinsman, Elcazar had adopted and taken under his protection an orphan nephew. It was in giving birth to this son that Elcazar's only sister, to whom he was tenderly attached, had breathed her last, her health having been previously injured and her heart well-nigh broken by the treachery of a faithless husband. The child became thus at once thrown upon the

care of his uncle, and had been brought up from infancy with Elcazar's family—though his narrow means made it often a matter of difficulty to keep even his own children from need. From the peculiar and distressing circumstances of his sister's death, and from the severe affliction which it proved to himself, Elcazar had given the child the name of Benoni.* And it was ever with melancholy interest, and with associations painfully fresh and tender, that to the last day of his life he either heard that name pronounced, or watched in the boyish features of him who was called by it, the resemblance of the mother's well-remembered countenance. "Wretch! villain! murderer!" would occasionally burst from his lips, as he dwelt in thought on the cruelty of him who had perfidiously broken those sacred ties, in which the life and happiness of his devoted sister had been indissolubly bound up. "Would GOD it were given me to cast the first stone at him!" muttered the angry avenger of a sister's blood. But such a wish in Elcazar's case was vain. He was far from possessing means and gifts costly enough to bring down the just sentence of punishment upon the adulterer's guilty head. Without gifts and bribes even ordinary claims of justice could not be obtained, much less those which involved the extreme severity of the law upon one, as in this instance, of a higher class in society than himself. Such a punishment would moreover have cast a severe censure upon a crime

* Benoni, the son of my sorrow.

too common, alas! in those corrupt days to be the object of any great degree of public indignation. Surely the cup of her iniquity is fast filling to the brim when a nation can thus look on such deeds with indifference. Well might the prophet ask of his countrymen, in the name of Him who sent him, "Shall not GOD visit for these things?"*

Elcazar had watched with pleasure the growth of an early attachment between his eldest daughter, Rizpah, and the young Benoni. Rizpah, in the time of vintage, would ever be in the company of Benoni, ready to receive from him his basket filled with rich clusters of fruit, as with active step he mounted from terrace to terrace, along the steep mountain side,† to gather them. And when the rejoicings after the vintage succeeded to the labours of the harvest, they who had been companions in the work of fruit-gathering for their employers, and in

* Jer. v.

† "It is obvious for anyone to observe that these rocks and hills must have been anciently covered with earth, and cultivated, and made to contribute to the maintenance of the inhabitants, no less than if the country had been all plain: nay, perhaps, much more; forasmuch as such a mountainous and uneven surface affords a larger space of ground for cultivation than this country would amount to if it were all reduced to a perfect level. For the husbanding of these mountains, their manner was to gather up the stones, and place them in several lines along the sides of the hills, in form of a wall. By such borders they supported the mould from tumbling or being washed down, and formed many beds of excellent soil, rising gradually one above another, from the bottom to the top of the mountains."—MAUNDRELL.

the gleaning for their own scanty profit, were still seen together, their hands joining in the dance, and their voices in the song, to the sound of the merry tabret and lute. These were bright days in the life of the two young friends, and good cause had Rizpah to recollect them, as she often looked fondly back upon the past. Now all was altered. The dark shades of the night of adversity had closed over those sunny hours. The shout of innocent mirth was no longer raised in what had once been the "joyous city"—much less was there the sound of the vintage and the gladness of the harvest season in her territories. No more in the beleaguered city could be heard the voices of "boys and girls playing in her streets and market places."* Even the buoyant spirits of childhood could no longer bear up against the heavy weight of calamity. Frequently did Rizpah contrast the present melancholy condition of her country with her own early recollections of it; and as she reflected inwardly on the glowing moments which had completed her own youthful happiness and united her in wedlock to him with whose heart hers had long been one, deeply did she sigh over the different prospect which awaited her own now fatherless and portionless children. For the miseries of the war, the famine, and the pestilence, GOD'S three sore judgments, had naturally caused the voice of the bride and the bridegroom to cease in the cities of Judah.

Elcazar had lived just long enough to be present

* Zech. viii. 5.

at the espousals of the young couple, and to give his blessing with his daughter to him, who had already long been virtually more his son than his nephew. The hard-earned savings of his life had enabled him a short time before to purchase the small vineyard at Beth-haccerem, which he had so long desired to possess. Having bequeathed this to Rizpah as her dowry, he was gathered unto his fathers, and taken from the evil to come. The sun of Benoni's career, which had risen, as we have related, under a cloud, was now shining, as regarded his earthly prospects, in meridian brightness. Such brightness, however, was but a brief and passing interval. Individual prosperity is incompatible, at least for any length of time, with national calamity. The branch cannot long continue vigorous when the trunk has begun to decay. The sun of Benoni's life, which rose but gloomily, was destined to set yet more sadly and gloomily; and dreary indeed was the night which followed—even more dark than the lowering clouds of eventide had seemed to threaten.

His misfortunes commenced by a succession of unfavourable seasons for the vintage.* This would have affected him but little while he was labouring on others' ground, and for their benefit only; but now having the vineyard which his father-in-law had left him, he was able to give less time to serving as a labourer in the employ of others, and was obliged consequently to depend more on his own

* See Jer. iii. 3; ix. 12; xiv. 4.

resources. The year following Elcazar's death was one of unusual drought. The withering stroke of the Divine displeasure, so often suspended in warning over rebellious Judah, was beginning now to descend with the accumulated weight due to long-despised forbearance. The early or autumn rains had fallen as usual, and, as the spring came on, all was looking fair and promising. The almond tree bore its delicate blossoms, announcing, as the harbinger of flowers, the commencement of another fruitful year—the pomegranate and the citron had arrayed themselves again after the refreshing moisture of the winter showers in their vernal costume, —the one of vivid scarlet and emerald—the other of snowy white, scattered like countless spangles over its foliage of bright and burnished green; but all were now waiting for the latter or vernal rain to afford them more copious supplies of moisture. Without this none could hope to withstand the scorching heat and cloudless days of a Syrian summer. Benoni had hailed with delight the swelling buds of his choice vines, and in imagination fancied himself already treading the flowing wine-presses, with the feeling hitherto unknown to him of gathering with his own hands the produce of his own vineyard. But day after day passed away, and no rain fell. The ground became gradually dry and chapped, and the smaller plants, whose roots were but shallow, began to languish. There came at length late and scanty showers, barely enough to prevent a total failure of the crops. It was a season of distress and scarcity; and they who, like Benoni,

had only their own little plot of ground to depend on, felt the loss severely.

This misfortune was aggravated by another of a different kind, though equally unexpected. Benoni had hoped to spare some part of his time to be employed in the service of the same master for whom he had worked in his boyhood under Elcazar's eye. He trusted to have thus still earned something, however trifling, as a labourer in the neighbouring vineyards. The far greater part of the Beth-haccerem district belonged to Talmon or his relatives—and it had been by this connection, as servants in the family of Talmon, that Deborah, the sister of Rizpah, had been chosen as the nurse of Hadassah's children. When Talmon first heard of Elcazar's having purchased the little vineyard, which adjoined his own grounds, he was disappointed and displeased—for though it would have been but a trifling addition to his own already extensive possessions, yet in his fancy it would have made them more complete. Considering, however, Elcazar's advanced age, he promised himself that a few years more would again place it within his reach—and he determined that then nothing should keep it from him. Accordingly, on Elcazar's death, Talmon at once demanded of Benoni that he should sell the vineyard to him for whatever price it had been originally purchased.

The demand fell like a thunderbolt upon poor Benoni. The memory of him, who had been more than a father to him, seemed ready to rise up in judgment against him, if he parted with that which

it had been the aim and pride of a long life to purchase as an inheritance for his family. The tears flowed fast from Rizpah's eyes as she heard the sad proposals named by her husband, and as he asked her whether she had the courage to face such hardships as he foresaw would be the consequence of refusing Talmon's request. It was, however, refused; and Benoni, from that hour, lost all prospect of being employed in any part of the Beth-haccerem district, except the little spot which now became more endeared to him than ever.

The year succeeding this commenced with promises, as bright and hopeful to the husbandman, as its predecessor; but disappointment and disaster, though arising from a new source, were still destined to blight his prospects. The early harvest of wheat and barley had scarcely become ready for the sickle, when, at the command and instigation of the Babylonian monarch, there came bands of spoilers from north and south at once, to ravage the territories of rebellious Judah. Jehoiakim, after three years' submission to Nebuchadnezzar, had suddenly broken off his allegiance, and the king of Babylon, not being ready at the time to take the field himself, gave liberty to the neighbouring hostile nations to plunder and harass the revolted province till he should arrive in person to inflict summary punishment.

Too gladly did they, who had ever been a thorn in the side of Judah, hear the intelligence, and speedily did they avail themselves of Nebuchadnezzar's name and authority. The destroying

edict found a ready echo in their hearts. "Down with it," "Down with it, even to the ground," was their watchword; and they engaged without delay, hand and heart, in the work of aggression. While the Chaldeans scoured, with their numerous cavalry, the fertile lands of Benjamin to the north of Jerusalem, driving off the cattle, and making prisoners of the inhabitants of Anathoth, and its neighbouring villages, the Moabites and Ammonites to the south overran the hill country about Beth-haccerem, keeping the poorer and defenceless people in constant alarm, and either stripping the vines, or forcing their possessors to gather the fruit in an unripe state, when it was scarcely fit either for eating or for the wine-press.*

Thus the close of Benoni's second year found him involved in yet greater difficulties than that of the former one; and the same system of plunder and marauding incursions continuing, as it did, for three successive seasons, completely reduced him to the lowest depth of distress. Poverty he had learnt in the school of early trial to encounter without fear; but now debt began to stare him in the face. The usurer's griping hand seemed already about his throat; and his worst anticipations proved, in the sequel, but too true. The helping arm to which he might have looked for aid and protection had not only been withdrawn, but turned against him since his resistance to Talmon's wish; and even a season or two of weather which

* Harmer, Vol. I. p. 89.

proved more favourable to the vintage were not sufficient to repair the losses of Benoni's few first years of independence. He struggled with his difficulties, but in vain. It was to no purpose that all the energies of a fond husband, and father, were put forth in the cause. The claims of an increasing family more than kept pace with all that his utmost efforts could do to supply the wants of the present moment; but the arrears, the avaricious claims of the urgent creditor could not be thus satisfied. Year by year all was parted with,—cottage, vineyard, implements,—but all the debt was not yet paid. There now remained only man's native birth-right, personal liberty, and that at length was forfeited, and the once happy though humble vinedresser of Beth-haccerem became the bond-slave of the usurer.* His manly vigour and

* See Lam. iii. 34.—"To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the land." "By the 'prisoners of the land' I am persuaded are meant the poor insolvent debtors whom their creditors, among the Jews as well as among other nations, were empowered to cast into prison, and oblige them to work out the debt; a power too often exerted with great rigour and inhumanity. See Matthew xviii. 30. The sufferings of these persons seem to be alluded to in Isaiah lviii. 3, where the people asking with surprise why their voluntary fastings and acts of self-mortification were so little noticed and regarded by God, received for answer, that while they laid themselves under restraint in one point, they indulged their vicious passions and inclinations of different kinds, and showed not that forbearance in their treatment of others which they hoped to experience at the hand of God."—Blayney's *Notes to the Lamentations*.

sinewy arm were no longer to be employed for his own or for his children's maintenance. They were now another's property, and to be hired out for any servile work within or without the city walls, such as might best repay the master's rapacious desires. His health, inhaled with the first breezes of morning on the mountain side, had never failed him. While labour was to be found, that could help him to supply his wants, he had never for a day been obliged to shrink from it. But now that valued strength and health, as far as regarded his own or his children's welfare, was a useless possession. Though still his own, yet for all the fruits it could produce, it was another's. Such had become Benoni's condition shortly before the siege of Jerusalem was commenced by the Babylonians in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign.

A most unexpected event now happened which for a time raised the drooping spirits of Rizpah and her husband, and made them almost believe that the storm of adversity was at length subsiding, and about to be succeeded by at least a calm, if not by the bright beams of returning sunshine and happiness. Both king and people were alarmed at the formidable preparations which Nebuchadnezzar was making, and at the angry threats which he had pronounced against Jerusalem and her inhabitants. The weight of his vengeance they had often before experienced, though now for an interval of about nine years they had preserved themselves from any open exercise of it by submitting to his commands and avoiding to provoke his displeasure.

But Zedekiah at length in an unhappy hour gave ear to the advice of evil counsellors. Encouraged by so long a peace, during which the city had in some degree recruited her resources, he ventured in spite of his oath and covenant to refuse further submission or tribute. He proceeded further to make a defensive treaty with the Egyptians, and thus brought down upon his people once more the aggravated vengeance of the powerful king of Babylon. As the northern armies drew near marking their onward progress with desolation, and writing the bitter sentence due to the rebellious and the covenant-breakers in the burning characters of destruction by fire and sword upon the fair face of the country, dismay began to spread among the various ranks of the citizens of Jerusalem. Fugitives were daily arriving who had been driven from their dwellings in the country by the approach of the hostile troops, and had only just had time enough to escape, and bring away what part of their goods were most light and portable. The infirm, and the aged, who could not easily be moved, had already fallen into the hands of the enemy; and the separation from them, as well as the treatment which it might be naturally expected they would receive, added no little to the grief and distress of those who had themselves but with difficulty escaped.

As this alarm spread more widely through the city, consultations were held among the princes as to what measures could be taken for averting the calamity that was evidently gathering over them.

Many who disbelieved altogether the denunciations of the prophets would have continued to rely on their own strength and the promises of their Egyptian allies. But a suggestion was fortunately made by one in the council which was at length after no little opposition carried and acted on. Gedaliah the son of Ahikam was reported to have been the author of it; and his well known piety, which had rendered him a marked character among his fellow nobles, gave strong grounds for making the report believed. His suggestion was that as the present year happened to be a Sabbatic one, there should be a general observance of it; and that accordingly every man should set free those of his countrymen who had become slaves. This was one step, he knew, towards a fuller obedience to GOD's law, and he hoped that in two ways it would be of service in leading towards further improvement. The feeling on the part of those released would naturally be that of gratitude towards their GOD, as the author of a law so humane and considerate, the beneficial effects of which they would have so lately experienced, while on the part of those who had set free their brethren, he hoped that the consciousness of one good action would be an inducement to proceed in the right direction. Thus he trusted that each party being better disposed towards the other as brethren, and both towards GOD, the one as having fulfilled one of His laws, the other as having reaped recent and sensible advantage from that law, they might unite in returning unreservedly to His allegiance. All parties were agreed in the ex-

pediency of taking some measures to avert, if possible, the anger of their offended GOD; but many appear, as the sequel proved, to have been actuated only by a sense of immediate fear in giving way even to the proposition of Gedaliah. The little, however, which they did do, and under whatever motives it was done, was enough to prove, to their own shame, that they were not ignorant of the existence of their law, nor of the intention of some at least of its precepts, notwithstanding the neglect and contempt with which they had so long treated it.

Gedaliah's advice was for the present acted on, and accordingly Benoni found himself once more, and most unexpectedly, restored to the blessings of liberty. But there came not back together with liberty, that which had so much endeared both life and liberty to him—his vineyard and his cottage. GOD'S law had commanded "in the seventh year thou shalt let thy brother go free from thee, and when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty; thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy wine-press; of that wherewith the LORD thy GOD hath blessed thee thou shalt give him."* But the want of sincerity in their resolutions of amendment began at once to betray itself in the men of that generation. Benoni, and his fellow bondmen went out, as they had come in, empty-handed. Those who had let them go out of their possession, made not their good work com-

* Deut. xv. 12.

plete. "That which their hand found to do they did not with their might." And the insincere in motive will ever be found fickle in practice. "A double-minded man," we are told, "is unstable in all his ways," and so it quickly proved with them. For the present, however, Benoni rejoiced at regaining his freedom, and with a lighter heart, and fleeter step than he had known for months before, he hastened back on the day of his liberation to clasp once more his wife and children to his bosom. Tears of unmingled joy were shed by both husband and wife at so unlooked-for a meeting; and hopes, however faint and delusive, were indulged of the return of days such as were now only known to them by distant recollection.

A few months passed on, Benoni labouring in the mean time with all the energy, which the remembrance of past misfortunes, and the hope of avoiding their recurrence could supply. The siege had, however, commenced, and it was consequently a hard struggle for the humbler classes, especially for those whose trade, like that of Benoni, had been one of an agricultural kind, to find employment or means of support. But hope, and the happy feeling of satisfying even so scantily as he now did, a father's and a husband's claims, kept his spirits still buoyant. The prospect of peace, which the princes and many of the prophets continued to promise, sustained him through hardships and privations such as nothing else could have made tolerable. Often did he and Rizpah, no less to console themselves than to amuse and cheer their children, lay

their plans together for the future, and in their more sanguine moments, they sometimes ventured to ask why it might not be with them, as it had been with the good old Elcazar? Why the evening of life might not yet see their hopes crowned with success, and find them or their children again in possession of that little spot in the mountains of Beth-haccerem, with which their earliest and happiest associations were bound up?

CHAPTER VIII.

"Whoever will consider the whole commerce of human life, will see that a great part, perhaps the greatest part of the intercourse amongst mankind, cannot be reduced to fixed and determinate rules. Yet in these cases there is a right and a wrong: a merciful, a liberal, a kind, and compassionate behaviour, which surely is our duty; and an unmerciful contracted spirit, a hard and oppressive course of behaviour, which is, most certainly, immoral and vicious. But who can define precisely wherein that contracted spirit and hard usage of others consist, as murder and theft may be defined? There is not a word in our language which expresses more detestable wickedness than oppression."—BISHOP BUTLER'S *Sermon on Self-deceit.*

THE POOL OF SILOAM.

THE TOMBS OF THE KINGS. SEE PAGE 115.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Beloved, let us leave the city gay,
And roam the fields, nor rustic huts despise;
Fresh on our cheeks young morning's breeze shall play;
We'll watch the flowers expanding, and with eyes
Observant mark the vineyard's growth, and stray
Where rich pomegranates yield a luscious prize."
NAGHTEN'S *Version of Solomon's Song*, vii. 11.

"Oft when returning with her loaded bill,
Th' astonished mother finds a vacant nest
By the hard hand of unrelenting clowns
Robb'd, to the ground the vain provision falls;
Her pinions ruffle, and low-drooping scarce
Can bear the mourner to the poplar shade;
Where all abandoned to despair, she sings
Her sorrows through the night."
THOMSON'S *Seasons, Spring.*

As a gleam of light bursting forth from amid the dark masses of cloud, that foretell the rising storm, causes the approaching gloom by the force of contrast to be more intensely felt, so it happened once more, and for the last time in the little world of Benoni's hopes and prospects. The besiegers were suddenly aroused by a report of the Egyptians

advancing to the rescue of Jerusalem. The siege was immediately abandoned. The Babylonian host vanished from under the walls of the daughter of Zion; and she vainly thought that danger was again averted. Benoni's heart beat high; patience seemed at last to have brought her reward, and he was among the first to follow the steps of the retreating foe, and to breathe again the free mountain breeze on his native hills. It was about the month of June, and summer was at its height. The rays of the sun, which was now nearly vertical over Judea, seemed but a genial warmth to Benoni, as he hastened through the village of Bethlehem, along the well-known track towards Beth-haccerem. All indeed was desolate compared with what he recollected it to have been. Every spot bore sad traces of the spoiler's ruthless hand. The cottages which Benoni so well remembered, and where in happier days, he had often, on his way to and from Jerusalem, been accustomed to enjoy a few minutes' rest and friendly entertainment, were pillaged; and the unroofed walls, where they had been left standing, were blackened by fire. He had no time, however, to stop. His object that day was partly to explore, and see if any place near Beth-haccerem could be found to receive his wife and children, and partly to search for some fresh fruit and vegetables for one of his younger daughters, whose health had failed for want of wholesome and suitable diet since their removal into the city. After considerable search Benoni had been able to collect a few figs and pome-

granates, with a water-melon and some garden herbs; and he was already anticipating the pleasure of seeing his little Zillah enjoying his refreshing present. Sanguine and hopeful he endeavoured to dispel the forebodings of parental anxiety, and to beguile his homeward way by picturing to himself the glow of health rapidly returning to the wasted features of his child.

It was about eventide when he now began to draw near to the walls of the sacred city. The heat of the day and the distance which he had walked, both in exploring the state of things about Beth-haccerem, and also in seeking for his scanty supply of fruit and vegetables, had wearied him; but he allowed himself not to tarry even at his old and accustomed resting places, that he might lose no time in relieving the wants of those dearest to his heart. It was towards home, humble as that home was, and towards his family, the home of the parent's and the husband's heart, that he was hastening, and he needed no more to add speed to his steps. In imagination he was already there. Alas! it was only in imagination that he was ever to see that home again. Each moment now brought him nearer to the Bethlehem gate of the city, nor had any suspicion or fear of what was about to happen, suggested itself for a moment to his mind. Having crossed the valley of the son of Hinnom, he had now only to ascend the opposite hill, and he would again be within the city. Throwing fresh energy into his steps, and keeping his eye fixed on the massive tower of the gateway, as its battlemented

outline stood out in bold relief from the clear evening sky, he quickly climbed the steep and winding road which led to it, and stood before its entrance. Here voices of contention and lamentation first reached his ears. On a day like that, of general rejoicing, such sounds surprised him. At the same moment he found all eyes turned towards him, and among them he quickly recognised those of Jozapah the usurer, his former bond-master. Before there had been time for the truth to flash across his mind, he felt strong hands laid upon him, and he was again in the grasp of the usurer's relentless agents. Dismay and horror now combined with the effects of weariness to deprive Benoni, for a time, of sense and consciousness. In an instant objects indiscriminately swam before his eyes. He sunk down in a swoon upon the spot where his course had been first arrested; his little bundle of fruit and vegetables, carefully tied together in fresh palm leaves, fell from his hands in the confusion of the moment, and was soon either trampled on or rudely plundered by the crowd which thronged the gateway. Benoni for a few minutes neither saw nor heard what passed around him. Kind nature had given a brief respite to his feelings, lest the shock should be too severe. He recovered however, shortly, but only to find himself together with several of his former bondfellows, once more at the mercy and in the clutches of his treacherous oppressor.

That day had seen the crowning act of Judah's perfidious conduct at once towards her children

and towards her GOD. "In trouble they had visited Him, and poured out a prayer when His chastening was upon them." In the hour of affliction they had shown their pretended zeal for His law by observing the customs of the Sabbatic year, and by setting free their brethren who were bondmen. But no sooner was the chastening hand apparently withdrawn, than they reverted to their former evil practices; nay, sought even by greater enormities to compensate themselves for the time during which they had hypocritically refrained from those practices. The departure of the enemy from their walls seemed to release them at once from all fear both of man and GOD. During Benoni's brief absence from the city it had been agreed among the princes that the slaves who had been released before the commencement of the siege, should be again recoverable by their former masters; those princes themselves being, many of them, the persons to be chiefly benefited by so perfidious and cruel an enactment. On the resolution being known instant search was made throughout the city by the several masters, and strict watch was kept at the gates for those who were missing, that they might be seized without delay, if they should return to the city in the evening.

A few weeks produced another and a fatal change in the position and prospects of Jerusalem. The brief respite which she had enjoyed had been indeed, in her case, only the calm which ushers in the fury of the storm. And though she had but so lately experienced what it was to find herself

like a vessel cast upon the waves, without chart or pilot, yet even this had not had the effect of warning her to employ to her advantage the interval and respite thus graciously allowed her. Instead of "strengthening her shattered mast, and bracing up her loosened tacklings," she had given herself to greater indolence than before, and was found less prepared than ever for the shock with which the tempest of adversity now assailed her. It is ever so with the wicked. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Warnings only harden some; and were it not that it is the work of Him who knoweth how "to bring good out of evil," "getting Him honour even upon such as Pharaoh and his host," and "reserving the wicked for the day of destruction," we might often wonder why the stroke of vengeance is so long delayed, or warnings so many times repeated. With Judah GOD had indeed dealt as a tender Father. He had spared no efforts either of His protecting or correcting power, so that He might make her "partaker of His holiness." Year after year He had chastened her, and year after year had again taken off His chastening hand. But her children understood not His dealings. Though their "feet trode His courts," yet they went not with their hearts into His sanctuary. They "came not into His secret;" for "the secret of the LORD is with the righteous." They neither saw GOD's mercy now for the last time trying them, nor "understood they the end" which GOD pre-

pares for such as themselves; "how He sets them in slippery places, and then suddenly casts them down and destroys them."

The path leading to such an end had now been irretrievably taken by Jerusalem and her children. She was again a beleaguered city. The enemy had returned, after a short absence, prepared to resume the siege with increased energy and determination. The Egyptians under Pharaoh Hophra had been defeated and repulsed; and the Babylonians, encouraged by their victory, had encamped again before the walls of Jerusalem, only the more intent than ever on her destruction. The wealthy were now called upon to furnish fresh supplies of money for the support of the troops, and also to take their own share and turn in the defence of the fortifications, or to provide able and armed substitutes. Benoni was accordingly chosen to fill the place of his master, Jozapah. He thus found himself suddenly surrounded with duties for which he was both by habit and inclination unfitted, as well as with hardships and dangers which he had never anticipated. All this, however, he could have borne had there been but a ray of hope for his future prospects. But what could he look forward to? Even if the city should be able to outlive the siege, what, after the late instance of treachery on the part of its rulers, could be expected by one in his condition? Nothing but a life of bitter oppression and bondage. It was in another's stead, and at another's arbitrary will, and not by his own free act, or for his country's sake,

that he, like many others, was now obliged to risk life and limb in the face of the enemy. He felt the degrading nature of the tie which bound him to the discharge of such duties, although under other circumstances he would willingly have done his best to discharge them.

Few and hurried were the visits which he was now able to pay to his beloved Rizpah and his helpless children; and it was at length only to find them at each successive visit in still deeper grief and affliction. The pestilence had carried off his youngest daughter Zillah; Deborah, his sister-in-law, who had hitherto lived in Talmon's family, as nurse to Hadassah and her children, and who had been able occasionally to relieve the wants of Rizpah, her sister, was now obliged to seek refuge herself with Rizpah, having been dismissed from Talmon's dwelling in consequence of the alarming scarcity of provisions in the city. Telzar, also, his kinsman, had been lately slain with his two sons, and had left Benoni now with hardly a friend among his comrades to console him. All these things struck a chill upon Benoni's heart and spirits, even colder than the bitter north wind, which numbed his stiffened limbs as night after night he paced his allotted beat upon the lofty walls of Jerusalem. His eyes looked anxiously towards the east for the first dawn of returning day; yet when the morning had arrived, he almost wished it were night again that he might indulge his grief in silence and in solitude. It was after a night so spent, and when he was just expecting to

be relieved at his post, that Benoni was suddenly alarmed, as day began to break, by observing, among the Babylonians, preparations for an earlier attack than usual against the walls of the city. The light was only just sufficient to enable him to discern companies of soldiers, some already advancing, and others apparently ready to follow as soon as they had given the advanced guard time enough to lead the way. Their attacks of late had been less frequent; for they had been employed in casting up huge mounds against the fortifications of the city in more than one quarter, and very little appeared wanting to complete the one on that side of the city where Benoni's post was assigned to him. That morning they had determined to attempt the sudden completion of the most advanced of their mounds. Large quantities of stones, earth, rubbish, and brushwood had been collected, and it was intended to make a hasty approach with these materials under the cover of the war-engines. They hoped thus to be able to fill up the small remaining intervals of space between the mound and the wall, while those employed in doing it were protected by the archers and engines playing upon the enemy.

Benoni instantly gave the alarm, and was himself the first to mount the roof of the nearest flanking tower, from which they might, with the greatest advantage, attack the besiegers with missiles and other contrivances. He was quickly followed by others, and the tower was soon filled even to confusion. The enemy had now assembled in num-

bers on the mound, and were beginning to pour in a dense shower from their cross-bows and slings, as well as from their engines, upon those who ventured to show themselves upon the walls. Benoni being among the first who mounted the tower was naturally exposed in the very front of the battle, and it was not long before a massive stone, hurled from the mound, struck him in the head. In an instant, bathed in his own life-blood, he reeled and fell. The parapet of the tower had, some time before, been injured by a former attack; so that, the crowd now pressing forward from behind, the remains of the wounded man were forced headlong from the tower into the deep trench beneath, and were there left, out of the reach of friend or relative to pay them the last kind tribute of respect.

The enemy were on this occasion speedily repulsed, and with but a trifling loss on the side of the besieged; for the attempt had been a premature one. But it had left at least one more widowed heart bleeding and in anguish; and had made one more family fatherless and orphans in that devoted city. The evil tidings soon reached the unhappy Rizpah, and she now discovered, for the first time, that it was possible for afflictions to be even greater, and more severe than those which she had already borne. Benoni, although a bond-slave, and oppressed, and in need, had still been her husband—a comfort to herself, and a father to her now orphan children. But even these consolations were for ever lost and gone. She had seen and had pitied others while watching by the side of

their wounded and dying relatives. But what would she have given now, had she but been able to purchase even this sad privilege—had she been only allowed to know that the remains of him, who had been endeared to her by so many ties—ties of childhood's intimacy, of early and of ripened affections—ties of associations of happier years, and more lately by the ties of bitter but freely shared fellow sufferings—had she been but able to see or know that his remains were laid in peace beneath the earth, it would have been some alleviation of her present misery. But that he should have been snatched away from her without a farewell word or look, that his mangled frame should lie unburied, nay, exposed to the insults of the stranger and the foe, it was a blow to her heavier than she was prepared to bear; heavier than she could have conceived possible, until the dreadful reality actually fell upon her. Such was the condition of Rizpah, the elder of the two women who were seen among the throng anxiously waiting near the gate of Benjamin for the arrival of the king. They trusted, like many others, to be able that day to lay their troubles before him, and to seek for aid in their distress.

The king's guards were now seen advancing from the direction of the palace. Busy voices were immediately heard here and there among the crowd, as though they were preparing for some declaration of their feelings as the king passed by. Among the multitudes who had assembled there, various, as may be supposed, were the motives and objects

which had brought them together. Some had come, perhaps, from mere curiosity—some urged by real distress; but others were there who had far less innocent and creditable intentions in view. Of this latter class, one named Milcah, a middle-aged female, now approached Rizpah and Hatipha. Her bold, masculine expression, and resolute step, promised nothing very gentle or soothing, much as such treatment was required at the time by the circumstances of the two unfortunate friends. Her words, as they soon found, were but too well in harmony with her appearance. With a look of revengeful exultation in her countenance, she exclaimed, as she came up to them, "Why are my neighbours, Rizpah and Hatipha, so sorrowful to-day? What mean this cloud and gloom that overspread their faces? Is it not to-day that we are going to see that cowardly dreamer of Anathoth punished for his treachery?" "Will it be so?" asked Rizpah. "Doubtless it will," replied Milcah; "the king will no longer resist the will of the princes; he will no longer suffer our brave soldiers to be daily discouraged and their spirits disheartened by this one perverse and self-willed fellow. Are all the other prophets to be despised, who bid us defend our city against the enemy? And is this Jeremiah to set up himself above them all? No—let us join in the cry, as the king passes along, 'Away with him to the dungeon or death; and let all the enemies of our country and of our safety so perish.'" Milcah had not known by sad experience what it was to have lost her only friend

and protector, as Rizpah had done; nor had she felt at all in the same degree as many others the sufferings of want and famine. Her husband, Dascon, was one of the foremost among the daring and turbulent soldiers of the city; and she had shared in the supplies which he and his comrades had too often procured for themselves by such violent means as have been already mentioned. She and some others had that day been urged by their husbands to go among their acquaintance and neighbours, that they might assist in raising a popular cry against the prophet Jeremiah; so that if the king hesitated at all in consenting to the request of the princes, their efforts might be strengthened by the voice of the people. Milcah had accordingly been busily moving from group to group among those now assembled around the gate of Benjamin, and had been inflaming their minds with enmity towards the prophet by her false and bitter invectives against him. "What wonder," she asked of Rizpah, "that your husband should have lost his life upon the ramparts? Who can have the heart to fight, or to support his comrades in danger, while such cowards as this Jeremiah are allowed to go unpunished?—while they are still permitted to damp the courage of our warriors, by foretelling destruction and slavery, and every other calamity upon our city?"

Rizpah's tears flowed fast at the mention of Benoni's unhappy fate. "If the truth were known," continued Milcah, "this foreboder of evils is probably looking forward to be rewarded by our ene-

mies for his treacherous aid to their cause. But let us have vengeance on him for our injured friends before that can happen, say I; and let his blood answer for his cowardice. Will Rizpah join with her neighbour Milcah, in a vow to the Queen of Heaven, that vengeance may this day fall upon the head of the prophet? I have yet a store of incense left, enough to supply us both for an offering on her altar, and some meal to knead cakes withal to her honour, if she but grant us to see our desire upon this our enemy."

Rizpah's heart smote her again. The proposal of Milcah brought back to her mind thoughts of long-neglected advice, which in her youth had often been carefully poured into her ear. The aged Elcazar had been one of those who, in the good King Josiah's time, had entered warmly into that pious monarch's plans. Gladly had he hailed the opportunity, and according to his humble power had assisted his sovereign in his endeavours to purify the kingdom from the idolatrous rites which had become so prevalent. Elcazar had to the last of his days been as regular as circumstances would allow, in his yearly offerings of the first fruits, and other appointed sacrifices, upon JEHOVAH'S altar; and he had laboured to impress the lesson upon his children. Rizpah, though she had never so far departed from her father's precepts as to offer upon idolatrous altars, yet was convicted by her conscience, not only of having neglected the offerings and worship due to JEHOVAH, but of having looked with a venial eye upon those who had themselves

engaged in such forbidden rites. Nay, more—Milcah was an instance of Rizpah's having had friends from among those who had thus deserted the true God. Affliction and trouble had probably brought these things more home to her mind of late, but she had never before been thus familiarly invited to partake in such guilty practices. The proposal, therefore, sounded harshly in her ears. The unhesitating and bold manner, too, in which it was suggested and pressed upon her seemed to imply that in the mind of her who made the suggestion there was no idea or fear of its being met with repugnance. Others, therefore, her own neighbours, thus appeared to look upon her as all but a partner in their guilty customs. Alas! what would Elcazar have thought of such a character attaching to his daughter? At such inward reflections tears of remorse for the past, mingled with those of present distress, burst forth, and formed her only reply to her neighbour's impious suggestions.

It was but lately, too, that she had for a trifling sum parted with the ancient and venerable roll of the law, which had been a dying present from her father to herself and her then youthful husband.* From its sacred columns Elcazar had often been wont to read aloud to his assembled household and children; and its holy lessons had been too carefully instilled into their still tender minds to allow of even memory proving faithless to her task. The vitality of good seed in the moral as well as in the

* See Lam. i. 11.

natural world seems wonderfully and providentially ordained. Outward circumstances may for a while prevent its vegetation; but still it lies ready and equally prepared as ever to bud and germinate as soon as any congenial opportunity may offer itself. Rizpah could not forget what had been so diligently implanted and nurtured in the soil of her infant mind by the hand of parental love and affection; and now the remembrance of it seemed to recur to her with double force, as accident suddenly reminded her that she had neglected its practice. That she should, moreover, have allowed a treasure once so highly valued to go out of her possession—it seemed to her at this moment as if, in doing so, she had deliberately taken farewell, not only of the roll itself, but of its giver and of the sacred precepts which it contained. True, her urgent need and the cries of her famished children had been strong appeals to a mother's feelings—enough to induce her to make any sacrifice that was in her power; and till now circumstances such as these had appeared sufficient to justify her in parting even with her father's dying gift. But so soon after its loss to be tempted to violate by idolatrous practices its well-remembered lessons, now came home to Rizpah's heart as a providential reproach for her disregard of it. It was a keen and bitter moment this, even to a spirit like Rizpah's, long inured to sorrow and trouble. Just then the king, with his guards and courtiers, passed by, and at once entered the gate of Benjamin. On hearing the crowd moving past her, Rizpah almost involun-

tarily removed her hands for an instant from her face, where they had been placed to conceal her grief, and to stay the current of her tears. It was but for an instant that she looked up; but in that instant her eyes met those of Talmon, as he with the other nobles was following the king into the court of the gateway. No other human countenance, except, perhaps, that of Jozapah, could have been so unwelcome to Rizpah's sight at that moment. It was associated in her mind with the first blight that had settled on the bloom of her youthful hopes, and that to her had turned the garden of life's promised joys into a waste wilderness.

Nor was she the only one among the assembled throng to whom that momentary interchange of looks caused a bitter pang. "The wicked flee when no man pursueth," says the wise man. They carry their pursuer with them. Even the rustling of a leaf is enough to disturb a guilty conscience. Much more a look from eyes wherein another's consciousness of the offender's guilt is written. But to Talmon that look conveyed more than a consciousness of his cruelty; it was the look of one who had become conscious of it by suffering from its consequences—whose emaciated features and care-worn expression told even more eloquently than the tears with which her cheek was moistened, the tale of lengthened sorrow. Talmon had heard of Benoni's death through Deborah's occasional intercourse with Hadassah. But of the widowed Rizpah and her orphan children he had thought no more till that hour; and he would

have given much to be spared the pang that then shot through his heart. He could not but remember that he too was a father and a husband. What assurance had he that under the present circumstances his own wife and family might not soon be left helpless and in sorrow? How soon might not Hadassah be like that widowed form which now met his eyes, scarce able for weakness to support the weight of the sickly infant which she clasped to her bosom? Yet had he not himself, asked conscience, been greatly the cause of this very distress which he beheld?

On Rizpah herself such repeated shocks, coming, too, as they did, so unexpectedly, had the effect of quite exhausting her little remaining strength; and she besought Hatipha to assist her in leaving at once a spot where fresh trials seemed to be every moment awaiting her. Hatipha sought to console and dissuade her; but in vain. Accordingly they began slowly and sorrowfully to thread their way through the mixed crowd which now thronged the immediate neighbourhood of the gate of Benjamin. How they were to subsist even for another day it was beyond Rizpah's power to foresee. All other resources had failed, and now she had been obliged to abandon for the present the hope of any public relief from the royal bounty. Heavily did this thought weigh upon her mind, as she and Hatipha were retracing their steps down the steep descent which led from the high ground on which the gate of Benjamin was situated, to the low valley of the Tyropæon, the place of their present dwelling.

CHAPTER IX.

"All is not sound within that is fair without, nor they furthest from danger who feel least pain for the present: such as since have lived securest, neither regardful of Hierusalem's misery, nor the calamities of other nations that ensued them, altogether unacquainted with any like sorrows of their own times, shall have their deepest share in the horrors of that dreadful day, whereof these were but shadows and maps, to represent unto us in some proportion the inconceivable affrightments that shall then appear."—JACKSON'S *Works*, Book I. c. xxiv. p. 194.

CHAPTER IX.

"If for fear of offending men, or from a false love of peace we forbear to defend the truth, we betray and abandon it."—BISHOP WILSON'S *Sacra Privata, Tuesday Meditations.*

MEANWHILE the scene, the much dreaded scene, had fairly opened before the king as he sat in the seat of judgment among the princes. They had that day by Seraiah's advice assembled in unusual numbers for the purpose of intimidating, if necessary, the weak and wavering mind of Zedekiah. Among them was to be seen Talmon, intently watching the king's words and looks; and heartily glad of the opportunity of dispelling from his thoughts the disagreeable reflections which had been so unexpectedly forced upon them. Many cases demanding redress and assistance awaited the king's decision—such either as had been referred by wealthy suitors from other courts in order to tire the patience and exhaust the means of poorer clients, or such as could be determined by the king alone. Amongst the latter were applications for help and support from the public stores which were

at the king's disposal. Zedekiah entered more readily than usual upon the consideration of some such cases, gladly availing himself thus of any opening that seemed to offer itself for putting off the evil day. But he little thought of the advantage which the princes intended to take of the brief delay thus occasioned to their plans. It was indeed their own intention and purpose that a few instances should first be heard of peculiar hardship and distress among the relatives of those who had fallen in the war, or whose dwellings and employments had been injured by the siege; and contrary to their general custom they suffered the king without opposition or remonstrance to settle some allowance of provisions on such persons out of the public stores. At other times they had always contended against such a use of the city's resources, representing the need there was of reserving them all for those who were, as they maintained, fighting their country's battles. The king was himself astonished at their present forbearance. He looked round and saw near him the well known countenances of Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashur the son of Melchiah, the very persons who had so often withstood his own better and more benevolent designs. Why were they silent now?

As soon as Shephatiah's keen eye observed in the king's looks this sensation of astonishment, the favourable moment appeared to have arrived, and without further delay he begged permission of the

king to bring charges against one whom he asserted to be a traitor and enemy to his country. The king having given assent and prepared himself to listen with as much attention as his irresolute heart and anxious feelings would allow, Shephatiah proceeded—"We have seen too many instances even to-day of my lord the king's warm and fatherly interest in his people's welfare to allow us to doubt that he will kindly hear the petition which his princes and captains have agreed to present to my lord the king. The sufferers whom the king's bounty has this day relieved, would bear witness against us if we for a moment questioned his benevolence and tender regard for the safety and prosperity of his subjects. Let the king's face be favourable therefore to the request of those who now come to make their petition before him, not for their own but for their country's sake. They see the miseries which war has brought upon their city, and the distress which, but for the gracious hand of royal bounty, must have already pressed heavily on their fellow-citizens. The king's servants bewail the loss and slaughter of so many of their brave comrades in arms, who have fallen in nobly defending the walls of our holy city and the temple of our GOD. Will my lord the king then suffer that any should treacherously cause a continuance of such miseries? Will he suffer that one traitor and dreamer should weaken by his seditious words the hands of all our brave soldiers. Yet such a one is Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah. Hath he not by his vain 'burdens' and 'visions'

disheartened our minds, and caused our ranks to be thinned by the cowardly desertion of many to our foes? Would that his fate had been the same as that of some whom his evil counsels have betrayed, and whom a deserved death has overtaken in the act of perfidiously falling away to the Babylonians. We should then have had no need to seek our lord's notice this day, and to entreat him, as we now do, that he will cause the traitor Jeremiah to be put to death ere another sun shall have arisen on his treachery."

"Let him be put to death"—"let him be put to death," cried many voices at once from among the nobles who surrounded Shephatiah; and at the same moment there came forward another from among their body to urge the suit upon fresh evidence and additional charges of his own. "Let the king's ears be open to the words of his servant," said Irijah the son of Shelemiah, as he addressed himself to Zedekiah, "I bear my testimony to the truth of these charges against the pretended prophet of Anathoth. Was not I captain of the ward, and posted at the city gate, at the time when our enemies retreated on hearing of the approach of our Egyptian allies? And did not this Jeremiah attempt then to fall away to the Chaldeans? Of a surety, if my lord the king's servant had not been there to intercept him, he had long since joined our adversaries, and strengthened their hands as he is daily weakening ours. Did not the princes then punish him and upbraid him with his treachery? but in vain. Will my lord the

king, then, suffer such a one to live? Let him die the death, and let his blood be upon his own head."—"If," said Zedekiah, in reply to what had now been urged, "if the prophet has already been punished by the princes, and since that confined by my command in the prison of the city, according to your desire, what injury can he now do, supposing that he be ever so ready to favour our enemies?"

"Does my lord the king believe," asked Pashur, the son of Malchiah, "that this disturber of our country is so easily quieted? Long ago, indeed, if he had been willing to listen to our advice, or to the king's commands, he would have ceased from his seditious language, instead of daily maligning his brother prophets, and pronouncing burdens of evil against them and us. But advice and warning, commands and threats are alike useless upon one so hardened and infatuated. Has he not filled the court of the prison with his turbulent sayings? Not a day but he publicly denounces death by the sword, by the famine, and the pestilence, upon all who venture to remain faithful to their country; and the foolish crowd of women and cowards believe his pretended visions and messages from the LORD. Hath not the LORD spoken by others as well as by him? Let my lord the king ask of his servants whether these things be not so. Here are they who have heard with their own ears his daily blasphemies against our holy city. Will my lord the king then refuse the request of the princes, and save this man's life who hath been the death of so many of his countrymen? Shall we not have pro-

phets left when he is gone?"—"How fared Hananiah the prophet, the son of Azur?" asked the king, at the suggestion of one of his councillors, as Pashur spoke of other prophets. "Are his promises fulfilled, which he spake, saying that the yoke of the king of Babylon should be broken within two years? and did this Jeremiah prophesy truly, or falsely of Hananiah's fate?"—"We fear," replied Pashur, "that my lord the king has allowed the poisoned malice of that deceiver's tongue to reach his royal heart. It was the same cause, probably, which occasioned the death of Hananiah, that also caused his word partially to fail. Who shall doubt that this destroyer of his brother prophets has at his command fit tools to do his deeds of darkness? Can any suspicion be too foul to attach to one who would play the traitor with the safety of his country? Did he not go himself to Babylon to concert his plans, and return again after many days, blinding men's eyes to the truth of his designs by some vain tale and vision of a ragged girdle which the LORD had commanded him to hide in a rock? Can we suppose then that he had not ready means of supplanting one who was not bold enough, like Hananiah, to attempt to counteract his plans? Let not my lord be deceived.

"And can we ever hope for success while such a one is among us? Is it even safe for the life of my lord the king, and the lives of his servants, to let such a perfidious enemy any longer watch our movements? With all our vigilance will he not find some opportunity of escaping and joining those

who are our foes, but his allies and friends? We beseech the king, therefore, let this man be put to death. Let him be given into our hands, and he shall never again deceive his weak and foolish countrymen, nor dishearten our brave soldiers, nor betray, as we believe he designs to do, both our king and city into the power of the proud Babylonians. We shall then see what his burdens, and parables, and visions will come to."

A unanimous burst of assent to Pashur's words from the assembled princes convinced Zedekiah that there was no possible escape from pronouncing the sentence which they desired, unless he were willing to run the risk of deeply offending them, and incurring their heavy displeasure. This he had not the courage to do. His mind, too, was still wavering in its judgment about the truth of the prophet's words; for whenever any circumstances forced home upon him a stronger conviction than usual of the probability of Jeremiah's denunciations being fulfilled, he would shelter himself under the vain hope that other prophecies were at variance with those of Jeremiah. Ezekiel's prediction that he should not see Babylon, opposed, as it seemed to be, to that of Jeremiah that he should be carried there, was the staff on which his weak mind rested itself in the hour of distress. Yet the struggle between the earnest remonstrances of conscience, and the flattering delusions of a groundless hope, was a hard one; and it was long ere he could permit himself to give way to evil councillors, and to betray the prophet into their

hands. But how should he extricate himself? One only path lay open to him on which he could with reason rely. That one he had not now the resolution left, if indeed he ever possessed it, to venture upon. To go forth with his family and children, as the prophet bade, and deliver himself up to the Babylonian army, though by thus acting he could have saved his conscience from a deed of gross injustice, and though he had, moreover, the promise of saving also his own and his children's lives, yet this he could not bring himself to decide on. And he reflected that it was possibly ere now too late even for this. So long had he resisted the prophet's advice that circumstances, inevitable circumstances, as he argued himself into believing, seemed to leave him no alternative. As Zedekiah thus hurriedly and anxiously debated the matter in his mind, he was unconsciously drawing towards that fatal but frequent conclusion into which weak and guilty minds sink, that one fault must be committed to screen another. Fain would he have relieved himself; but the effort was beyond the now enfeebled state of his moral powers. He felt as one who has heedlessly rushed forward to the brink of some deep chasm, trusting to blind chance for the means of clearing it, but suddenly suspecting it to be beyond his power, is yet unable to check or arrest his course.

Hastily did these feelings pass through Zedekiah's mind. Fears and doubts chased each other in quick succession, like the broken scud before the coming storm. The conspirators watched their

opportunity; and as their irresolute monarch sat for a few moments hesitating, before the fatal sentence escaped his lips, they pretended to construe his silence into consent, and boldly indulged in expressions indicating satisfaction and mutual congratulation. Reluctantly at length did Zedekiah give up their victim to their malice. Finding his decision indeed already forestalled by their applause, he timidly added, "Behold, he is in your hand; for the king is not he that can do anything against you."

As the hawk pounces with deadly aim upon its prey, when, after long hovering over its head, the favourable moment at last arrives for its capture, so hastened the princes from the seat of judgment to the court of the prison where the prophet was confined. Among the foremost of them was Talmon. In his manner there was something unusual and anxious. In the midst of his triumphant exclamations at the success which had attended the plans of the princes, there seemed to be some uneasy and harrowing subject on his mind, the recollection of which he was endeavouring to drown by means of present excitement. A look probably from the same widowed features which had met his eyes as he entered into the court of judgment might again be awaiting him as he left it; and he shrunk from the very thought of another such shock. His companions were reasoning about the fittest means of completing their design. Talmon was in favour of immediate and summary measures. "And how," said he to Shephatiah, as they left the

gateway of Benjamin together, "shall the traitor's life be now despatched? Shall we bring him out to the people that they may stone him, or shall his blood be forthwith shed by the sword, his head fixed over the gate to warn others, and his carcase cast out upon the dunghill? Or shall we hurl him headlong from the highest tower of our city walls, and so our foes shall know that their ally has at length met the fate which he so well deserves?"

As Talmon spoke these words he caught a glimpse of a person forcing his way through the crowd, whom he at once recognised as one of his own military attendants at the fortress. Dismay was painted in his looks, especially as he approached nearer to Talmon, and found that he had attracted his notice. "What tidings of the enemy?" cried Talmon, aloud and boastfully to the messenger, raising his voice that he might be heard by the multitude which thronged the place. "Are they rash enough to approach again our invincible bulwarks? or are they tired of life that they would leave their heathen carcasses under our walls? or have they come to the aid of their perfidious ally, the prophet of Anathoth? Doubtless he has found means of informing them of his present danger, and of the determination of his countrymen to reward his treachery. By the life of Malcom, they must be quick if they would rescue him from a traitor's death this day. Bid them wait till evening, and his head shall be thrown to them from our city walls. Slay my first-born if his burdens fall not now upon the dastard dreamer's own head."

A hoarse shout of applause rose from a thousand tongues as they thus caught the welcome announcement, so vauntingly and blasphemously made, of the intended fate of the prophet Jeremiah. He had been no prophesier of smooth things, and had consequently long been the object of popular aversion; in addition to which the base slanders of treachery towards his country, so industriously propagated by the nobles respecting him, had rendered this feeling of enmity against him doubly virulent. For a few minutes the shouts of the populace drowned all other sounds; and Talmon, absorbed in the guilty excitement of the moment, and proud of the effect produced by his words, remained unconscious and yet unapprised of the bitter tidings which the messenger at his side was waiting to deliver. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Little was Talmon aware that he was now standing on the very brink of the gulf of affliction, into which another moment was about to plunge him. At this one and the same instant his mind was haunted with the remembrance of a certain widowed form—his tongue was yet vibrating with the words of triumph in the prospect of an innocent fellow creature's death, but his eyes were unconsciously gazing on the life blood of his first-born, his only son.

The life of his child, which he had just before impiously staked against the prophet's life, was no longer in his power to save or to destroy. While the princes were assembled in execution of their

cherished design before the king, the enemy had made an attack upon the tower where Talmon was usually stationed, and where during his absence he had left his son under the care of some friends and attendants. During the attack, which was made rather with the intention of harassing and annoying than with the hope of any decisive result, a random arrow striking against the side wall of the tower, and glancing off from some projecting stone work, being thus turned in its direction, fell and wounded the youthful Zabad in the shoulder, as he was stooping to pick up something from the ground. Its speed had been but little checked, though its direction had been changed; and consequently the wound proved a severe and fatal one. The shrieks of the bleeding boy soon brought one of Talmon's attendants to his aid. Plucking the arrow as gently as possible from the wound, he found the blood flow still faster than before. He lost no time therefore in stripping off his own linen girdle, and binding it carefully round the boy's shoulders; then raising him in his arms he hurried off with him to Talmon's own dwelling, but it was only to lay the lifeless form of her son in Hadassah's bosom. Having once more loosened the girdle and pointed out the wound to Hadassah, the messenger hastened on, believing that he had left Zabad only in a swoon from loss of blood, but desirous of informing Talmon with all speed of what had happened. As he related the facts, his bloodstained garments bore painful witness in a father's eyes to the truth of the tale. The shouts

of the multitude were now dying away, and the messenger, who had been for some moments near Talmon, but unable on account of the noise to deliver his message, again addressed him. "What sayest thou?" cried the terrified father, "my child wounded, bleeding? Who hath dared lay hands upon him?" "None, let my lord be assured, hath laid hands on him. It was an arrow from the enemy's host that smote the lad," said the messenger. "As we were engaged on the battlements watching the enemy's movements he stood behind us on the tower steps, sheltered, as we thought, from any chance of harm. Suddenly amid a shower from their slings and bows, his shrieks were heard, and we found him with the arrow still fastened in his flesh." "Enough, enough," cried Talmon; "where is my child now?" "These arms have borne him to my lord's dwelling," replied the messenger, and ere the words were past his lips, Talmon had burst from the spot towards his home, as speedily and abruptly as he had rushed from it a few hours before.

At that time he had left the wife of his bosom in grief and alarm at his violent and revengeful expressions against the life of one who had never given him any real ground of offence; he returned now to find her bending in tears over the still warm but lifeless frame of her youthful son.

Hadassah's fond anxiety for her husband, added to other laudable motives had induced her to despatch a confidential messenger that day to observe the proceedings of the council and to bring her the

earliest tidings of the result which the petition of the princes to the king might produce. She had been for some time eagerly waiting the return of this messenger that she might have some means of allaying her uneasiness. In the meanwhile she had not been without hope that some happy obstacle might occur to prevent the cruel and wicked design of the princes against the prophet. Accordingly at the first sound of footsteps in the porch she came forward, fully anticipating the arrival to be none other than that of her informant, and impatient to learn from him the important intelligence. But how different from what she had expected was the sight that met her eyes! Her son helpless, wounded, and in the arms of a stranger—the stains of blood fresh on the garments of both of them—his eyes half closed, his lips quivering as though with recent pain, his tongue instead of gladly replying as formerly to his mother's fond greeting, speechless and unable to answer her earnest calls and inquiries. She was willing at first to believe the soothing suggestion of the attendant who assured her that the lad was but faint from loss of blood. Accordingly she at once proceeded with an energy and presence of mind which nothing but the urgency of the case and the evident necessity of promptitude could have imparted, to wash and stanch the gaping wound; and then to bathe the brow of her child with the coolest water she could procure. The suddenness of the wound and the speed with which he had been conveyed to his father's dwelling by

the faithful soldier had not yet allowed time for the colour to fade from his ruddy cheeks. The loss of blood had really been but small, and death had followed speedily upon the blow. Scarcely any change consequently had yet taken place in his features. They seemed still to wear the glow of youthful health upon them. The air of insensibility or unconsciousness which had spread over them might easily have been mistaken for the effect of a temporary swoon. His sisters stood by watching with childish curiosity and alarm their mother's efforts as she alternately sprinkled the cool water over his face, and then applied each sweet-smelling restorative that her ingenuity could supply. As their infant lips continued to lisp his name, "Zabad, Zabad, speak to us, Zabad," they appeared surprised that no answer was returned to their entreaties. Little were they able to realise to themselves the fact that their brother's lips were already sealed in the silence of death. Unconscious alike of his mother's endearing calls and of the united voices of his sisters as they again and again in tones of increasing urgency repeated his name—insensible of the kisses which they were imprinting on his hands, he lay still and motionless, except when occasionally a shattered nerve or sinew near the seat of the wound caused a momentary convulsive movement. No symptoms of returning animation showed themselves; and bitter, agonising misgivings began to shoot across the mind of Hadassah. Yet as often as she gazed again on his still unaltered features, and clasping his hands in her own felt them still

genially warm with life, she strove to check such fears.* Unwilling to part with the last ray of hope she struggled to suppress the rising flood of grief within, which like the pent-up stream was each moment gaining fresh and resistless strength. At this moment Talmon rushed in, alarmed, and not

* "He who hath bent him o'er the dead
Ere the first day of death is fled,
The first dark day of nothingness,
The last of danger and distress,
(Before decay's effacing fingers
Have swept the lines where beauty lingers),
And marked the mild angelic air,
The rapture of repose that's there,
The fixed yet tender tints that streak
The languor of the placid cheek,
And—but for that sad shrouded eye
That fires not, wins not, weeps not now—
And but for that chill, changeless brow,
Where cold obstruction's apathy
Appals the gazing mourner's heart,
As if to him it could impart
The doom he dreads, yet dwells upon;
Yes, but for these, and these alone,
Some moments, ay, one treacherous hour,
He still might doubt the tyrant's power;
So fair, so calm, so softly sealed,
The first last look by death revealed!"

The Giaour.

"It is to be remarked that in cases of violent death by gunshot wounds, the expression is always that of languor, whatever the natural energy of the sufferer's character; but in death from a stab the countenance preserves its traits of feeling or ferocity, and the mind its bias to the last."—Note to the *Giaour.*

less agitated than when he had so hastily left his home at an earlier hour—but now from what a different cause! He had then been indignant at the prophet for having denounced according to GOD'S command that the sword, the famine and the pestilence should be let loose upon the city and its inhabitants. Now that sword had fallen upon his own house; and in bitterness of heart he was compelled to acknowledge that as a melancholy fact which before as a warning he had refused to listen to.

The dismay and distress which were visible in every feature of Hadassah's countenance were not likely to diminish Talmon's fears, as he, in almost breathless haste, inquired, "What tidings are these, my Hadassah? Where is Zabad, my son? What has befallen him?" Hadassah, who had come at once to meet him on hearing his steps, could only reply to his questions by seizing his arm and hurrying with him into the room where the remains of what was once their beloved child were lying stretched on a low couch near the open window. His dark, glossy hair, still soft and moist with the effect of healthy exercise, hung thickly about his neck, like the luxuriant foliage from which the sun has not yet had time to absorb the dew of early morn. "Zabad," cried his father, catching fondly his hand as it was hanging by the side of the couch, "Zabad, my son—speak, my child. It is thy father who entreats thee; thy father, Zabad, if he, who thus left you alone and in

danger, deserves the name. Alas! why was I so mad as to let thee, my son, be thus exposed to risk and harm? Why did thy mother suffer thee to leave her side?" "Say not so, Talmon," cried Hadassah. "Have I not again and again besought thee to leave the child with me? Are my warning words of this morning so soon forgotten?"

Talmon's hopes, as he gazed earnestly on the motionless features of his son, were from the first moment far from sanguine; nor were they raised when he beheld the ghastly wound from which Hadassah had now washed the still oozing blood. His eye had been but too familiar of late with death in its various forms; nor did he dare to disguise from himself, after a few moments' investigation, that his own home had at length furnished a victim to the fatal weapons of the destroyer. Unprepared as he was, by the tendency of his recent habits and associates, for bowing with submission to any dispensation of GOD'S chastening hand, the effect produced on him was but as the effect of some potent herb or drug upon a constitution essentially undermined. He was shaken, nay almost convulsed for the time by the sudden loss and bereavement; but the struggle was followed by no successful or permanent victory over the mental disease. Self-willed and infatuated he had been before, and now such feelings became only the more strengthened and determined. Imprecations of revenge and of anger against the foes, whose deadly arrows had deprived him of his son, were

mingled with profane and presumptuous curses against that GOD who would allow His people to be thus afflicted and persecuted.*

Hadassah strove with tears and caresses to calm the storm of passion which raged in his bosom. She, who might naturally have looked for support and aid from him in the hour of affliction, was required to soothe his ungoverned feelings. At length tranquillised and won over by his wife's tender and affectionate interference, he laid aside his violent language, but only to sink into an opposite fit of melancholy and depression. The long-continued excitement of the morning, at the meeting of the princes, combined with the harassing and trying scenes which he had since passed through, exhausted for a while his energies, both mental and physical—and he seated himself on the ground in silence near the corpse of his son, his tears fast flowing,† his head buried in his hands, to ponder over his bitter and irreparable loss.

* Jer. xxiii. 10. † Jer. ii. 37. 2 Sam. xiii. 19.

CHAPTER X.

"The virtue of prosperity is temperance, the virtue of adversity is fortitude, which in morals is the more heroical virtue. Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament, adversity is the blessing of the New, which carrieth the greater benediction and the clearer revelation of GOD's favour. Certainly virtue is like precious odours most fragrant where they are incensed or crushed; for prosperity doth best discover vice, but adversity doth best discover virtue."—LORD BACON.

CHAPTER X.

"But what more oft in nations grown corrupt,
And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love bondage more than liberty;
And to despise, or envy, or suspect
Whom God hath of His special favour raised
As their deliverer? if he aught begin,
How frequent to desert him, and at last
To heap ingratitude on worthiest deed?"

Samson Agonistes.

In the mean time the princes, or at least a portion of their number speedily repaired to the court of the prison. There, with a look of triumphant malice, they quickly singled out their unhappy victim from among his numerous fellow-prisoners. Engaged at the moment in earnest conversation he observed not the approach of the princes and their attendants, until they were almost close enough to catch his words. A general stir and movement among his companions was the first thing that arrested his notice, and he had no sooner turned round to ascertain the occasion of it, than he found himself standing face to face before Irijah, Shepha-

tiah, and his other accusers. Before he had scarcely been allowed time to form any conjecture from their looks respecting the nature of their present errand, he heard, in a tone of bitter but triumphant sarcasm, words that were enough to settle any doubts. "Ah, traitor! What, detected in the very act again!" cried Pashur; "sowing the seeds of sedition, and cowardice, and treachery even within the prison walls. But come—go to—we will find thee fitter companions. This day shall show whether the stones of the lowest dungeon will make apt accomplices for a traitor's plans. The light of open day ill befits such deeds of darkness. Come, thou who sendest yokes to kings and princes, now is the season for thee to prove how thou canst bear such a yoke on thine own neck."

A cold shudder passed involuntarily over the frame of the prophet as he heard the dungeon mentioned. He knew by sad experience its horrors; and he was not wrong in supposing that confinement in such a place, under the present circumstances of the city, meant nothing else than a sentence of lingering death by starvation and disease. He had, however, been too long trained in the rude school of adversity to allow himself to be surprised into any incautious or unbecoming language. Continuing silent, but with an expression of countenance firm and undaunted, though at the same time meek and unassuming, he prepared himself to encounter the upbraidings of Shephatiah and the malicious looks of the princes, his companions. Though he had sometimes, when

alone, and in want or in suffering, felt the bruised spirit ready to sink within him,* though he had shrunk with instinctive dread from the duties of an office which seemed to stamp his whole life as a continued scene of external hardship, as well as of bitter enmity and animosity between himself and his fellow-countrymen, yet, whatever may have been his feelings at other times, it was on such occasions as the present, meeting as he now did, his opponents face to face, that the dignity of his office, and the importance of his high mission as GOD'S prophet, were sufficient to enable him to preserve his self-command and self-confidence. It was the cause of the Almighty, not his own, that he was called on to defend and support; and as he stood at that hour in the centre of the group which filled the spacious court of the prison, alone in his cause—his usual placid and melancholy look not for a moment interrupted by finding himself suddenly in the presence of his powerful accusers and foes—he might have been taken as a living emblem of the feeble instruments and apparently disproportioned means with which GOD often effects His greatest designs. His ways truly are not as our ways. The treasures of His power may be committed to earthen vessels, yet are they safe. His mode of executing His purposes may seem to us, in its progress, inadequate and unsuited to its end; but the foolishness of GOD is wiser than men, and His weakness stronger than men. Nay, these

* Lam. iii. 54.

foolish things He often chooseth for the very purpose of confounding the wise; and these weak things to confound the things that are mighty; thus bringing light out of darkness and good out of evil, that He may make our faith to stand not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of GOD.

There would have appeared but little probability in human eyes that the single and unprotected person who then stood at the mercy of a powerful and hostile confederacy of his fellow men—armed as they were not only with the outward weapons and accoutrements of strength, but fortified also by the authority of their sovereign, and with his commission to put into execution their deadly purpose—little probability would there have appeared at that moment, that they themselves would be the first to fall; and that at a future day when they would be in vain entreating mercy at the conqueror's hands, he, their present victim, should be at liberty and in safety. Unconscious, indeed, were the prophet's persecutors that they were by one and the same act preparing, not, as they intended, his humiliation and their own exaltation, but, on the contrary, their own condemnation and his rescue. To the careless observer every thing seemed to wear a contrary aspect. The very contrast between the outward appearance of the two parties—the burnished armour of the princes, their scarlet and embroidered tunics, their plumes and costly girdles—and, on the other hand, the plain, homely raiment of the prophet, spoke strongly to the eye of the difference between their

present respective circumstances. Originally of coarse and ordinary texture, the hair-cloth tunic, which Jeremiah wore, had not been rendered more sightly by his long imprisonment. Reaching from his neck to his knees, it was confined by a rude leathern girdle, which bound it closely round his loins. A more ample outer garment or mantle, of the same coarse material, was thrown around him, and hung loosely over his shoulders, the two corners meeting in front a little below the neck, and there being fastened, not by jewels of gold or silver and precious stones, such as glittered on the necks of the wealthy princes, in whose presence he stood, but by a clasp of the commonest metal. Leathern sandals, bound by thongs around his ancles, covered the soles of his feet. His bushy hair, as it hung in thick masses about his neck, and his flowing but untrimmed beard, combined to tell a tale, not only of voluntary abstinence from the luxuries most usual in that climate, but also of the hard and comfortless accommodation of the prison-house. No refreshing baths, no perfumed oils, or softening ointments, had reinvigorated his weary limbs and languid frame during the summer heats. And besides these privations, which men with studied cruelty had heaped on him, even GOD, in ordaining him to the office of His own ambassador and prophet, had denied him some of the blessings enjoyed by the humblest of his fellow countrymen. No fond partner of his life was to share with him either the cares or the comforts which the hand of Providence might bestow. He was never

to hope for the sympathy of a kindred heart, which should beat responsive to his own—never to unlock the secrets of his breast, or to repose his grief in the bosom of conjugal love. "Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons and daughters, in this place, said the LORD."* Others might marry and might give in marriage, but it was no time for the prophet of the Most High to do so, while GOD'S judgments were abroad in the earth. His lot had indeed been cast in evil days. Well might the prophet then, amid such scenes of national guilt and national suffering—scenes present and to come—"be pained at the very heart," and "weep day and night for the woes of the daughter of his people." Yet he forgot not, at the same time, that out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth both evil and good. The LORD, he knew, doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.† But because Jerusalem had grievously sinned, therefore was she removed—"Because filthiness was in her skirts, and she remembered not her last end, therefore she came down wonderfully."‡

It was with such feelings of conscious humiliation in behalf of his sinful country, and with a sense of GOD'S just visitation upon her, that Jeremiah had been on former occasions, and was now once more, enabled to meet the haughty chieftains, his persecutors, with meekness, and yet with undaunted firmness of purpose. He would not shrink

* Jer. xvi. † Lam. iii. 33. ‡ Lam. i. 9.

from his heaven-commissioned duty. Yet he wisely wished to perform it with as little of offence to others, and of suffering to himself, as possible, provided it was but executed faithfully. He sought not by any rash or fool-hardy forwardness, to expose himself unnecessarily to cruelty or insults. Unprovoked, therefore, by Shephatiah's upbraidings, he asked gently and patiently what new offence they had found him guilty of.

"Of the newest device which a traitor's ingenuity can suggest," answered Irijah. "Whose death wert thou plotting when we entered the court of the prison? Thinkest thou, traitor, that I have yet forgotten the blood of my father's house? Say, by whose hand was it that the prophet Hananiah perished? And shalt thou who doomest others to death thyself be ever free?—free to live while others are daily dying on our walls for thy protection—free to sow rebellion and cowardice while others are exposing their breasts to the enemy in defence of our holy city? Ask not what new offence thou art guilty of, but ask what new and more effectual punishment the princes have found out for traitors and murderers—or rather, ask not, but wait till the few next moments shall bring thee an answer to such a question." The prophet, foreseeing now what was about to happen, though he felt that words would be useless, yet, as a duty, once more protested openly before the princes and their attendant officers, who were preparing to seize him—before his fellow prisoners, who still stood around, anxiously intent upon what was passing—before all

who had gained admittance on this occasion to the prison-court, saying, "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard; therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your GOD; and the LORD will repent Him of the evil He hath pronounced against you. As for me, behold I am in your hands; do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you. But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof; for of a truth the LORD hath sent me to speak all these words in your ears."*

"Keep thy burdens for another season, or for a more willing audience," cried Pashur; "little leisure have we to listen to them. While we tarry the enemy is even now at our gates; and innocent blood is already shed, while the guilty are safe." This he said alluding to Talmon's loss, the particulars of which he had overheard as he was standing by while the messenger from the fortress was relating it. Having said these words, he gave a signal to the prison officers, who proceeded at once to the execution of their duty, by rudely seizing the prophet's arms, and smiting him on the mouth, that he should be silent.† They then hurried him away from the court of the prison through a gateway and passage into another and smaller court within.

In the centre of this court there was a narrow

* Jer. xxvi. † 1 Kings xxii. 24; Acts xxiii. 2.

opening in the pavement, resembling the mouth of a well, with a low ledge or border round the edge of it. This formed the only entrance or outlet to the gloomy dungeon beneath. A heavy slab of flat stone perforated with a few holes for the admission of air formed the lid or covering to this dark subterranean vault. This slab when placed over the opening could, if more than usual security was required, be easily sealed in its place, so that any removal of it might thus be with certainty discovered. In the rainy season the water found its way in by various leaks and crevices, and settling there caused the bottom to become damp and miry. The little air that was admitted was not enough to absorb the foul exhalations which were thus created; and they consequently deposited themselves upon the walls and vaulted roof in a thick mouldy coating or incrustation. This was only interrupted here and there by the channel which some leak from above had worn clean for itself upon the surface of the stone. A few niches or cabins raised a little above the level of the ground in the side walls formed the only accommodation for the wretched inmates to rest or lie in.* Here it was that the prophet Jeremiah found himself now for the second time rudely and hastily immured. The stone was placed over the mouth of the dungeon, and the princes hastened away elated at the successful result of their schemes; they trusted that in a short

* See Blayney's Notes to Jeremiah, chap. xxxvii. 16, and chap. xxxviii. 6.

time disease or want or misery would effectually despatch their victim, without exposing them to the odium or charge of having been directly and palpably the instruments of his destruction.

While such was the state of discord and distress within the unhappy city of Jerusalem, its foes and besiegers were in the enjoyment of abundance and of comparative safety. For the besieged, by loss of numbers, had now become too much reduced to harass them any longer by sallies from their gates. As indeed the strength and hopes of the one side daily declined, so those of the other gradually increased. The Babylonian monarch had himself retired to Riblath in Syria; but he held constant communication with his general Nebuzaradan, and sent such supplies of men and provisions as they required. The productions of the neighbouring provinces also were at their command, the nations bordering on Palestine, the Moabites, the Edomites and the people of Ammon gladly bringing in contributions, and assisting by every means in the destruction of their hereditary enemies. They looked on with undisguised delight at the fall of the holy city, their ancient mistress and foe. They taught the Babylonians how to insult with the most keen and cutting acts of mockery the captives whom in their skirmishes they had taken prisoners of war. Protected themselves by the besieger's hosts, they came within hearing of the walls, and uttered in the Jews' language the most foul revilings against their religion and their GOD. They mutilated not only the bodies of the dead,

but those also of the prisoners who fell alive into their power, plucking out their eyes and cutting off their ears, and in this state exposing them to the sight of their friends and relatives upon the walls.

It had now long been necessary to cease from burying within the city the immense numbers of poor who daily fell victims to the pestilence or the famine. Accordingly their dead bodies were thrown into the deep valleys beneath the walls. The Babylonians were not long in discovering the cause to which the death of such vast multitudes was to be attributed. It was evidently from want of the commonest necessaries of life. The blackened hue of their countenance, the parched and shrivelled skin, and the swollen tongue gave clear indications, in the absence of every mark of external violence, of the manner in which death had happened to them. To heighten therefore, if possible, the sufferings of the wretched inhabitants, and at the same time in order to induce them to surrender without further delay, the Babylonians occasionally held a sort of market within sight of the people who were watching them from the battlements and housetops of the city. Piles of refreshing fruits and vegetables were heaped lavishly on the ground, and held up to mock the privations of the famishing beholders. Fathers whose children were daily perishing for want of such wholesome and nutritious food, saw, within a few yards of them, the life as it were of their offspring—the means of restoring them to health and comfort. It was too in all proba-

bility from their own gardens and lands that these fruits had been gathered. Such sights brought back to their memory the former days of plenty, when they had enjoyed such blessings in abundance and thought but lightly of them. Now many a parent and husband turned away with a heavy heart and with moistened eyes from beholding a scene of such cruel mockery to his feelings.*

The device of the besiegers had thus its intended effect, in increasing the sufferings and sorrows of the besieged; but unhappily it had not the further effect of inducing them to bow to the rod, and submit themselves humbly to the correcting hand of heaven. The leaders of the people, infatuated and hardened alike against the advice of their prophetic guides and against the dictates of reason and humanity, were as blind to the necessity of submission to the Babylonians, as those Babylonians were to the fact of GOD'S prophets having foretold the speedy fall of Babylon itself. A veil was on the eyes of both parties. The "divine judgments were far above out of their sight." Each thought they were accomplishing their own ends in spite of the GOD of Israel; but GOD'S ends were nevertheless being accomplished by them in spite of themselves. "O Assyrian, the rod of Mine anger, and the staff in thine hand is My indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of My wrath will I give him a charge, to take

* See Josephus. Wars of the Jews, Book VI. chap. 14.

the spoil and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit, he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. * * * For he saith, By the strength of my hand, I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent; and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man. * * * Wherefore, it shall come to pass, that when the LORD hath performed His whole work upon Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks."*

The one side, by their self-will, were putting into the hands of the other the weapons and power necessary for inflicting that punishment which, by their very obstinacy, they trusted to avoid. The other were GOD'S instruments in inflicting that punishment. They were "the hammer of the earth" in the hands of the Deity, as the Israelites had formerly been in punishing the iniquities of the Canaanites. But inasmuch as the Babylonians did it not in the name of the true GOD, but to please their own proud and ambitious wishes, and in the name of their false idol gods, therefore they were themselves to be similarly visited with condign punishment when the cup of their iniquities was full.

* Isaiah x. 5.

"Thus saith JEHOVAH,
Behold I will raise up against Babylon,
And against those that dwell in the heart of Mine adversaries,
A destroying wind.
I will send against Babylon winnowers,
And they shall winnow her and empty her land;
For they shall be against her round about,
In the day of trouble by the wayside.
Let the archer bend his bow,
And let him not lift himself up in his brigandine;
And spare ye not her young men,
Destroy utterly her whole army;
And they shall fall down slain in the land of Chaldea,
And thrust through in her streets.

* * * *

Babylon is a golden cup in the hand of JEHOVAH,
Intoxicating the whole earth;
Of the wine thereof nations have drunken;
Therefore shall nations glory, (saying)
Babylon is suddenly fallen,
And broken; howl ye over her;
Take ye balm for her anguish,
If so be she may be healed.
We have applied remedies to Babylon, but she is not healed;
Leave her, and let us go every one to his own country;
For her judgment hath reached unto the heavens,
And is lifted up unto the skies.

* * * *

Make bright the arrows, fill the quivers;
JEHOVAH hath roused up the spirit of the kings of Media;
For His purpose is against Babylon to destroy it;
Surely it is the vengeance of JEHOVAH,
The vengeance of His temple.

* * * *

Oh, thou that dwellest by the side of many waters, that
abundest in treasures,
Thine end is come, O handmaid of thy covetousness.
JEHOVAH of hosts hath sworn by Himself,
Surely I will fill thee with men as with locusts,
And they shall send forth a shouting against thee.

* * * *

——I will render unto Babylon,
And to all the inhabitants of Chaldea,
All their evil which they have done in Sion,
Before your eyes, saith JEHOVAH.
Behold, I am against thee, O destroying mountain,
Saith JEHOVAH, that destroyest the whole earth;
And I will stretch out My hand over thee,
And I will roll thee down from the rocks,
And I will make thee a burning mountain:
And they shall not take of thee a stone for a corner,
Or a stone for foundations;
But thou shalt be perpetual desolations, saith JEHOVAH.
Lift up a standard in the land,
Sound a trumpet among the nations,
Enlist nations against her,
Summon kingdoms against her,
Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz;
Commission a commander against her,
Cause cavalry to come up like the bristled locust.
Enlist nations against her,
The king of Media, the captains thereof,
And all the rulers thereof,
And all the land under his dominion.
And let the land tremble and be in pain;
For the purpose of JEHOVAH against Babylon standeth sure,
To make the land of Babylon a desolation,
Without an inhabitant.

Therefore, behold the days come, saith JEHOVAH,
That I will execute judgment upon her graven images,

And through all her land the wounded shall groan.
Though Babylon shall have mounted up to the heavens,
And though she shall have fenced high her strength,
From Me shall spoilers come unto her, saith JEHOVAH,
The voice of a cry from Babylon,
And of great destruction from the land of Chaldea!
For JEHOVAH spoileth Babylon,
And destroyeth from out of her a great voice;
Their waves also roar like great waters,
Their sound hath caused a tumult,
Surely there is come against her,
Against Babylon a spoiler;
And her mighty men shall be taken,
And every one of her bows broken;
For a GOD of retributions,
JEHOVAH will surely requite.
And I will make drunk her princes and her wise men,
Her captains, and her rulers, and her mighty men;
And they shall sleep an everlasting sleep,
And not wake again, saith the King
Whose name is JEHOVAH of hosts.
Thus saith JEHOVAH of hosts,
The wall of Babylon, the broad one, shall be utterly razed,
And her gates, the lofty ones, shall be burned with fire."

BLAYNEY'S *Translation of Jeremiah*, li.

NOTE.—It has been hardly attempted either in this chapter or elsewhere to give any exact or accurate delineation of person or features, though with regard to the general character of the Jewish physiognomy, under favourable circumstances, it appears that materials are not wanting for at least a probable approximation to the truth. In proof of this assertion the following particulars may perhaps, without impropriety, be here introduced.

"We could not help being struck," says an intelligent traveller, "with the beauty of this race of people (the Polish Jews); for they seem by no means to have degenerated by limiting themselves to intermarriage with their own breed. The character of countenance is, from this circumstance, almost invariably the same, though not in any way resembling, what we call in England, a Jewish turn of feature. The women were remarkably handsome, their persons large and full made, their faces very regularly formed, with black eyes and hair, set off with delicate complexions of white and red. The men tall and straight, but rather of a spare habit, their features small, and very much fashioned like that meek and placid countenance which the Italian painters have invariably given to the picture of our SAVIOUR."—JAMES'S *Journal of a Tour through Poland, &c., in* 1813.

"Ensuite viennent les Juifs, qui sont en Egypte ce qu' ils sont partout; * * * Je ne sais si c'est parce qu' ils sont plus près de leur pays, que leur caractere physique est plus conservé en Egypte, mais il m' a paru frappant; ceux qui sont laids ressemblent aux notres; les beaux, surtout les jeunes, rappellent le caractere de tête que la peinture a conservé a JESUS CHRIST; ce qu' il prouveroit qu' il est de tradition, et n'a pas pour epoque le quatorzieme siecle et le renouvellement des arts."—DENON'S *Voyage dans la basse et la haute Egypte.*

Dr. Neale, speaking of the Jews of Poland, says, "The enjoyment of liberty and civil rights seems to have produced a strong effect on the physical constitution and physiognomy of this singular race; bestowing a dignity and energy of character upon them, which we may in vain look for in those of other countries. The men clothed in long black robes, reaching to their ancles, and sometimes adorned in front with silver agraffes—their heads covered with fur caps—their chestnut or auburn locks parted in front and falling gracefully on the shoulders in spiral curls, display much manly beauty; nay, I have frequently contemplated with astonishment many among them whose placid yet melancholy countenances recalled strongly to my recollection the heads depicted by Raphael,

Leonardo da Vinci, Carlo Dolce, and the earlier Italian painters, and which, until I visited Poland, I had conceived to exist only among the fine ideal forms of art. More than once an involuntary awe has seized me on contemplating, on the shoulders of a Hebrew villager, a head presenting those traits of physiognomy which, by a long association, I had always conjoined with the abstract ideal countenance of the SAVIOUR of the world."

CHAPTER XI.

"'For the transgressions of a land many are the princes thereof,' (Prov. xxviii. 2;) that is, it is punished with a confused government."—BISHOP WILSON'S *Sacra Privata, Friday Meditation.*

CHAPTER XI.

" Yet long on Eden's fair and fertile plain
A righteous nation dwelt that knew not Cain;
There fruits and flowers in genial light and dew,
Luxuriant vines and golden harvests grew;
By freshening waters flocks and cattle strayed,
While youth and childhood watched them from the shade;
Age, at his fig-tree, rested from his toil,
And manly vigour tilled the unfailing soil;
Green sprang the turf by holy footsteps trod
Round the pure altars of the living GOD;
Till foul idolatry those altars stained,
And lust and revelry through Eden reigned.
Then fled the people's glory and defence,
The joys of home, the peace of innocence.
Sin brought forth sorrow in perpetual birth,
And the last light of heaven forsook the earth."

J. MONTGOMERY.
World before the Flood, Canto I.

THE sun had once more set, and the night had again cast her mantle over that devoted city, whose further continuance as a dwelling or habitation of men was to be reckoned no longer by years or months, but by days or hours. In like manner, as the pallid hues of death on the countenance of the languid sufferer give warning of the coming event,

and gradually forbid every cherished hope of returning health, so symptoms, painfully distinct and clear, of approaching national dissolution showed themselves in the condition, both moral and physical, of the once favoured city of JEHOVAH. If a house be divided against itself how shall it stand? Ample proofs of the existence of this symptom of impending ruin had the day, which had just closed over her, exhibited in Jerusalem. Nobles confederate against their prince—both against the prophet of GOD—the rich and powerful against the poor and helpless—both against their rightful sovereign, the LORD JEHOVAH—and those divisions fomented by the very priests of the sanctuary who had abandoned the worship of the true GOD, and had suffered the abominations of idolatry at least to divide and share the homage due to the GOD of Israel—all these were indications in the moral aspect of things so plain that it needed no prophetic eye to foretell the issue.

But other evidence, and that of a kind to appeal still more strongly to the senses, met the eye of the passenger as he traversed those crowded streets, and crossed the open squares and market places near the city gates. Nor could even night conceal such scenes; rather it served only to increase their horrors. In the neighbourhood of the Bethlehem gate groups of persons were indistinctly seen through the twilight, some standing and apparently engaged in earnest and anxious conversation; others seated on the ground, in a kind of circle, around some helpless friend, who had sunk from

exhaustion and faintness to rise no more, and for whom his companions were in vain begging assistance and food from the passers by. Many of the poorest class, having expended their whole stock of food, had no other resource than to crowd about those parts of the city where they supposed there to be still some remaining store of provisions. Over these the captains and officers of the military guard, stationed at the chief gates, had the command, obtaining such supplies often by the most harsh and oppressive means, but always under the plea of its being necessary for those who were defending the walls. With the hope of sharing in some portion of the ill-gotten booty, there were multitudes who flocked around the spot, some offering any remnants of their scanty property which still continued in their possession for the slightest morsel of food—some holding themselves in readiness to perform any menial office for the troops—others, again, trusting to find some relation or acquaintance among the soldiery to befriend them in their need. Many having supported nature for some time by devouring the most forbidding and polluted kinds of food, and that at last having failed, they entreated to be allowed to make an attempt during the night to search, at the risk of their lives, for any of the commonest herbs that might by accident be growing outside the city walls. When occasionally permitted to pass through the gate for this purpose, if successful in their search, they were not unfrequently plundered on their return, or even murdered, for the sake of their hard-earned

prize. Yet each night distress and starvation compelled others to make the same request at the risk of the same result.

On the evening of that eventful day, of which we have now heard some of the particulars, the usual crowd had assembled around the Bethlehem gate. On all sides were heard the groans of the famished children and parents, over whom their last hours of misery were fast closing. They lay thickly strewn on the ground in the open space about the gate, many of them never destined to witness the light of another morning. Their cries and moans were but feebly heard amid the confused noise produced by the busy hum of the multitude, the sounding of the horns as the night-watches were set, and the tramping of many feet as they reached or left in various directions the precincts of the gateway. Among that throng two figures were seen at this moment, having just descended from the elevated walk which extended along the city walls, within the battlements, and on which the archers and other bearers of missile weapons were ranged in time of attack. Their faces were muffled and their mantles closely wrapt around them, as though they wished not to be recognised. From their passing onward, however, so unobstructedly, and being permitted by the guards so freely to continue their course along the fortifications, it was clear that they had the watchword and were persons in some authority. They had been observed to pause for a few minutes when within a short distance from the gateway-tower, and to listen ap-

parently with surprise at the sounds that reached them. From an upper apartment of the tower, near the flat roof on which the watchman kept his post, and in which apartment the guard for the first watch of the night was stationed, loud voices of revelry and boisterous merriment were issuing. By the light of some torches which were burning in the room there might be seen the heads of some of the party who were seated nearest the window; but the sounds gave clear evidence that these were but a small portion of the whole number assembled there. Peals and bursts of horse-laughter followed in quick succession on each other. The speakers were already excited by wine, and still voices louder than the rest were ever and anon heard cheering on their companions to more copious draughts. Among other sounds confusedly heard, the listeners fancied they could distinguish, coupled with many profane cursings and execrations, the name of the prophet Jeremiah. Each mention of it seemed to be the signal for renewed laughter and scorn; and a few moments more were enough to show that the prophet and his fate, as it had been that day determined by the king, was the present subject of triumph among these profane revellers.

At this discovery one of the two strangers started as if with alarm and horror; and whispering into the other's ear they turned back together for a few yards. Such sounds indeed of intemperance and merriment seemed ill to agree with the state of things around them. Misery and death in various shapes were hourly ex-

hausting every resource and hope that remained for the unhappy city. And could there be any among her sons, who so lightly regarded their own or their country's ruin as to indulge, at such a moment, in riot and revelry? When GOD'S judgments were thus abroad in the earth, "calling men to weeping and mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth,"* could there on the contrary be such hardihood in sin as to provoke the LORD still more by intemperance and profane mockery?† Such thoughts as these, though neither of those two listeners ventured openly to express them, darted hastily through the mind of each, as they first caught clearly the meaning of those

* See Isaiah xxii. 12 and 13.

† The picture here drawn of the atrocity of feeling which in some minds almost invariably accompanies the extremity of human misery, is but too well supported by many instances both from ancient and modern history. The following one from the records of our own country may suffice for our present purpose. It is the description afforded by an eye witness of the effect produced upon the minds of the population of London by the plague in the year 1665:—"The people themselves did not see the hand of GOD, nor seek righteousness when GOD'S hand was so dreadfully lifted up against us. In one house you might hear them roaring under the pangs of death; in the next tippling * * * and belching out blasphemies against GOD; one house shut up with a *red cross* and *Lord have mercy upon us*; the next open to all uncleanness and impiety, being senseless of the anger of GOD. In the very pest houses, such wickednesses committed as are not to be named. * * * The hottest judgments did not teach many of us to pray or repent."—Life of Gen. Monk, by T. GUMBLE, D.D., as quoted in Shuttleworth's "Consistency of Reason and Revelation," p. 147.

boisterous sounds. Strong contrast perhaps at that moment made the effect of such a scene more keenly felt by both of them; for only a few moments before in the course of their walk a very different spectacle had attracted their attention. They had passed along the southern wall of the city which runs parallel with the precipitous brow of Mount Zion. It was in that part of the city as being the highest and most agreeable, that the houses of several of the princes were situated, many of them surrounded with small plots of garden ground such as the space within the city walls admitted of. It was from one of these that the two strangers, as they had passed along the ramparts, had heard the wailings and cries of mourners engaged in some funeral rites for the dead. As there was now no access to the usual burying places on the outside of the city, those who possessed gardens within it were glad to avail themselves of such spots in which to deposit the remains of their departed friends. By the light of the torches which the attendants bore, a small and mournful procession was seen just reaching a secluded spot among some cypress and rose trees. The plaintive hymns of the minstrels were only interrupted by the violent strokes with which some of their company continued to beat themselves, and which could be heard in the stillness of the evening at some distance, as if keeping time with the more or less rapid flow of the mourners' tones. It was a sad though soothing sight, as it burst thus unexpectedly upon the notice of those two spectators, they being themselves

meanwhile shrouded by the distance and the darkness from the observation of others.

"For whom," asked the one, "are these funeral wailings made? Whose dwelling and garden is that in which we see yonder band of mourners?" "It is the dwelling of Talmon the son of Sheshai," replied the other. "This day his youthful son fell wounded on the walls by a stray arrow from the besiegers." "Of Talmon?" inquired the first speaker. "Saw we not Talmon at the council of the princes this day?" "Talmon," replied the other, "was among the foremost at the king's council on the morning of the past day. It was during the time of his being there that the attack was made in which the life of his son was lost."

A convulsive shudder which slightly shook the frame of the inquirer at these words, followed by a deep sigh, was his only answer; and the two walked on in silence till the next object of importance that attracted their notice was the sound of riotous mirth from the tower of the Bethlehem gate. While they stood for those few moments listening, they were noticed by certain of the crowd beneath, who still continued to watch their movements as they descended by the stone steps which led from the battlements to the area around the gateway. The two strangers were now threading their way as quickly as circumstances would allow, through the multitude, in order to gain the corresponding steps on the other or northern side of the gateway tower, intending to continue for the present their course along the ramparts. But before they

could accomplish their purpose they were accosted by one who had been anxiously observing them, and who had supposed them to be some chief officers of the guard. Throwing himself upon the ground at their feet and hastily seizing their garments, he besought them in a subdued but earnest tone to hear him if but for a moment. "Let thy servant find favour in the sight of my lord the captain of the king's host," said the suppliant; "let my lord hear thy servant's petition, and deny not a boon to one who desires but to put his life in his hand, and to seek death, or relief from his present miseries. Would to GOD that such miseries were only his own; but others dearer to him than life share them with him, and have no other earthly arm than his to look to for their protection or support. If my lord hath begotten to himself sons and daughters, he will know what it is to fear lest the desire of a father's eyes should be taken from him. He will have pity on those whose little ones are wasting daily before their eyes for lack of bread. Let my lord therefore show us where there is food within the city that we may eat it and live; and if not let thy servant be permitted to pass the guard at the city gate and seek for wild herbs or fruits beneath the city walls, or for the fragments which our foes have cast away in their abundance. Thy servant is a true man, he is no spy; he seeks not to betray the city of his fathers to the king's enemies. He will die on her walls, so he can but find bread for the mouths of his little ones. Doth my lord surely know what is reported among us—

what unholy things are already done in our city by reason of the straitness and the famine—that the children's flesh hath been the parents' meat—that the hands of the pitiful women have sodden the children of a span long? How much better were it that thy servant should die by the sword of the foe than —." "As the LORD liveth," exclaimed one of the two strangers abruptly, "what is this thing that I hear?" And as he spoke, seizing violently with both his hands the inner garment or tunic that he wore beneath his mantle, he rent it from the neck to the waist. Then burying his face in his hands, and leaning on his companion, he seemed for a few moments absorbed in thought, and overpowered with horror at the dreadful facts now for the first time disclosed to him. The suppliant at his feet was almost equally surprised; for instead of the captain of the guard, whom he supposed himself in the darkness of the evening to have been addressing, he now suddenly caught sight of the golden bracelets and signet ring, the emblems of royalty, on the arms and right hand of the person to whom he had been making his supplication. It was no other than Zedekiah the king. His curiosity having been excited by some unusual cases of distress which had, according to the design of the princes, come before him on the morning of that day, he determined privately to witness with his own eyes the true state of things in the city. He had accordingly, in company with his confidential attendant Ebedmelech, commenced after nightfall that evening what was intended to be a circuit

of the principal streets, and places of concourse in Jerusalem. Little did he expect to encounter so soon what would be sufficient to stop his further progress. He had, however, now seen and heard in the course of half an hour's walk more than years would ever be able to efface from his memory. As a king, as a guardian responsible for his people's welfare, he had felt the first shock of what he was soon destined to experience even more severely in the very bosom of his own family, namely the correcting hand of the Almighty upon a nation's hardened sins. Bitter was the foretaste of the cup of affliction which the morning and evening of that day had brought to Zedekiah; but it was yet reserved for him to drain it to its dregs.

For the present there was, in connection with the events of the day past, still one consolation providentially left to him; though even this, but for the watchfulness of his faithful and pious servant, would have been lost. As Zedekiah now hastened back to the palace, leaning on the arm of that humble but trusty friend, he deeply felt the value of even that single topic of consolation, and of the sterling worth of that counsellor whose prudence had secured it. That subject was no other than that the prophet's life had been rescued from the very talons as it were of the vulture. By Ebedmelech's kind interference this had been accomplished, the king having complied with his earnest request, and given him secret permission to deliver Jeremiah from the dungeon into which the princes had thrown him.

The effect, at this moment, of such a reflection upon Zedekiah's wavering and unstable mind was a kind of soothing persuasion that he had not yet utterly and irrecoverably committed himself; that there was still remaining a centre and nucleus around which better deeds and brighter hopes might gather. And so possibly it might have been, had he but possessed sufficient resolution and firmness to make the effort. The Divine promise was not even yet withdrawn that a voluntary and unconditional submission on the part of the prince and people to the appointed punishment should be the means of rescuing the family of that prince from destruction and the holy temple from the flames. How desperate then, how infatuated must have been the state of mind which could have resisted so merciful, so gracious an offer. For, besides what his own eyes had witnessed that day, the king had also the testimony and assurance of Ebedmelech that there was "no more bread in the city."* The last resources were beginning to fail. If the sword and the pestilence delayed to do their appointed work, the famine, in its turn, would soon accomplish it. One only escape from the extreme of misery, and from further rebellion against GOD now remained, and that was a speedy though late submission according to the Divine commands. But that only remedy for his own and his kingdom's utter destruction Zedekiah had not the resolution, as the next day proved, to adopt and put in practice.

* Jer. xxxviii. 9.

CHAPTER XII.

"The Old Testament is not contrary to the New, for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by CHRIST, who is the only mediator between GOD and man, being both GOD and man. Wherefore they are not to be heard which feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises."—*Seventh Article of Religion.*

CHAPTER XII.

"Methinks the sun his wonted beam denies,
Nor lends so fair a light to his sister's car;
Methinks each planet, mild and lovely star,
Has left its sweet course in the spangled skies.
Fallen is the heart of noble enterprise,
True glory perished, and the pride of war;
All grace and every virtue faded are;
The leaf is faded and the floweret dies.
Unmoved I am though heaven and earth invite,
Warmed by no ray, nor fanned if Zephyr blow;
All offices of nature are deranged;
Since the bright sun, that cheered me vanished so,
The courses of the world have quite been changed.
Ah, no! but sorrow veils them from my sight."

VITTORIA COLONNA.
*On the Death of her Husband.**

IT was now the third hour of the night. "The stars were shining" brightly and serenely "in their watches." As they moved on gradually but imperceptibly each in its appointed orbit, they seemed, in their own silent but eloquent language, to speak

* From Glassford's Italian Sonnets.—See Christian Remembrancer, No. LIV. p. 492.

only of tranquillity, and order, and peaceful harmony. How different this, how widely contrasted with the condition of at least one spot of that lower world on which they then looked down. That troubled and distracted city, she, too, had once known what it was to enjoy peace and harmony. She had been "as a city that is at unity in itself." And for her "those stars had once fought in their courses." For her children the bright luminary of day had been stayed in the heaven—for her the moon had turned in her constant path, and hasted not to go down over the valley of Ajalon. But now heaven and earth seemed alike combined against her. The cloudless spangled vault above, with its glittering host and tranquil aspect might well have appeared to the eye, which was at leisure to mark the contrast, like a proud rival looking down rather in triumph than in pity upon the feverish and convulsive efforts that were now fast rending in pieces the social frame of the daughter of Judah.

The heart in grief yearns for society and scenery congenial to its own tone and temperament. Whatever is of a contrary kind it shuns and recoils from, and seeks to reduce all for a time to its own sad level. The harmless pleasures which nature or habit throws in its way, it rejects with a feeling almost of loathing. That without which all these things were but worthless, or from which, and in connection with which, they gained their worth, is gone; and it would be denying to that lost object the respect which we are conscious is due both to

it and to ourselves who valued it, if we were to treat its loss lightly. At such a time scenes and circumstances which are unsuitable, and which will not assimilate themselves to the prevailing feelings, have only the effect of adding bitterness to the cup of affliction. Soothing though perhaps they may be in themselves, yet something within whispers that the fitting hour of consolation is not yet come; and the bereaved heart, Rachel-like, refuseth to be comforted.

So felt at least one—and she, perhaps, was but one of thousands who felt alike—as she, on that night, alone and in sorrow, gazed upwards for a few moments towards the face of heaven. Often, before, had she sat in the cool of the evening and watched the starry host, herself the centre of a little circle whose eyes to her mind glistened as brilliantly as any of those glittering orbs: often, with a mother's fond imagination, had she pictured the future bright with unclouded hopes and promises, for her little ones. But, alas! one of that little family-constellation had already and suddenly disappeared from her view. Zabad was no longer at her side. Zabad, upon whose tender years the sword and the perils of the battle-field had yet no rightful claim, had fallen. Zabad, her first-born, her only son, was now laid cold and lifeless beneath the massive stone against which she leant.

Hadassah had stolen a few moments thus to indulge her grief alone, when the funeral rites were concluded, and after the mourners and friends had returned from the garden to the house. Her ab-

sence, however, was soon observed. She was just making an effort to tear herself away from the spot now so endeared to her, and the last accents of her pious exclamation, "The LORD hath given, the LORD hath taken away, blessed be the Name of the LORD," had scarcely fallen from her lips, when well-known voices were heard approaching towards her. Among them that of the faithful Deborah was clearly distinguishable. Her affection for Hadassah and her children was that of a mother; and, accordingly, she had no sooner heard that day of Zabad's untimely death, the tidings of which soon reached her, than she at once repaired to Talmon's house. Great would have been her disappointment had she been prevented paying the last sad tribute of respect to the remains of him whom, as a child, she had nursed and fondled from his cradle. She had joined the mourners in their lamentations, and had only left them at intervals in order to administer consolation to Hadassah, or to be of assistance to Miriam and her two sisters. When inquiry was made for Hadassah, on the return of the family from the tomb to the dwelling, Deborah immediately repaired to the women's apartments, expecting to find her there. Another of the company, Gedaliah, Hadassah's uncle, had gone to seek her in a different direction. He supposed her probably to have retired to the terrace, on the housetop, that she might there indulge her sorrows for a while in private. As Hadassah was entering from the garden, leaning on Deborah's shoulder, Gedaliah had just returned from the

terrace, on the housetop, and met Hadassah at the doorway. With an earnest and troubled manner he immediately inquired, "Why didst thou leave us, my daughter? and where hast thou been since we returned from the garden? I had thought to find thee on the housetop."

These words, together with Gedaliah's unwontedly anxious look, at once convinced Hadassah that a dreaded secret, which she had hoped to keep from his knowledge, had suddenly and unexpectedly become known to him. On the housetop Talmon had lately, in spite of her earnest entreaties to the contrary, caused an altar to be placed, such as were now commonly used for burning incense to the queen of heaven. Ridiculed by some of his godless companions, and accused, in consequence of his connection with Gedaliah, of favouring the prophet Jeremiah, Talmon had been weak enough to give way, in spite of his early habits and better judgment, and had caused an incense-altar to be erected on his house. It had added one more to the many bitter trials which Hadassah had had to contend against of late, and one which was the more severely felt because she had no one to sympathize with her under it. She dared not mention it to her uncle or any of his kindred; for they were among the few who still resisted all such profanations, and who remained faithful to the worship of the GOD of Israel, and obedient to His prophets. Deeply, too, did Hadassah feel for her beloved Talmon. Daily she watched and observed the growing influence ex-

erted over him by his unprincipled companions, into whose society he had been necessarily more thrown since the commencement of the siege. Long had he ceased to complain, or to speak with disapproval, as he would once have done, of the worship of strange gods, and the forsaking of the LORD JEHOVAH in His own holy city. But in spite of such unfavourable symptoms, Hadassah was little prepared for Talmon's last step, the actual adoption of such unhallowed and forbidden rites by himself and in his own house. Carefully had Hadassah's parents and friends, in former years, inquired into the habits and principles of him to whom they gave their fair and pious daughter as a partner for life. And Talmon, as far as human eyes could judge, was one of whom, in his youth, it might have been not unreasonably presumed that his heart was right with GOD. But evil communications, and the tide of general corruption had sadly changed him. Hadassah's constant and affectionate persuasions had, doubtless, retarded the change, but, to her disappointment, her very endeavours, besides costing her many a painful effort when in Talmon's society, and many a pang in his absence, had moreover produced a gradual estrangement between Talmon and her uncle Gedaliah. Since the death of her parents, which happened soon after her marriage, she had looked up to Gedaliah as in the place of a father to her; and she had often had reason to be glad of his counsel and advice. On the subject of Talmon's growing indifference to the true religion, and his

evident inclination to give way to the idolatrous customs now so widely spread among their nation, Gedaliah had naturally held more than one anxious conference with her. But since Talmon's open act of defiance against the LORD JEHOVAH—in which light she had been always taught to regard the setting up of altars and burning incense to other gods—she had not found sufficient resolution to make the fact known to any of her uncle's family. Accident, however, had now betrayed it; and Hadassah felt that Gedaliah's most severe displeasure must be from that hour added to the many bitter ingredients which already filled the cup of her present affliction.

Gedaliah's first feeling was certainly that of pious indignation. He knew not but that Hadassah might have consented to Talmon's apostasy instead of having so perseveringly struggled against it; and he was prepared in honest zeal to disclaim, as the law of his GOD commanded, all further alliance with those who had renounced their allegiance to the LORD JEHOVAH.* But Hadassah's tears disarmed him for the moment, of his intention. He reserved it, however, only till the first seasonable opportunity. He had come at the present time to perform the neighbourly part of offering consolation to his relatives under affliction, and that he now proceeded with a kindly heart to do. Sending for Miriam and her two sisters, Naarah and Judith, and bidding them rejoin their

* Deut. xiii. 6, and xvii. 2.

mother, that he might thus divert her mind from the one sad subject which occupied it, he suffered the younger children to attract her attention by a few of their own artless questions. Having thus paved the way for other thoughts, he then quietly reminded her what blessings GOD had still left to her, and how happy, compared with many other mothers, she ought to esteem herself.

Hadassah's well-disciplined mind was soon calmed and soothed by such arguments, and as she clasped the little Judith to her bosom, she felt indeed that she had yet remaining what was enough to make her truly thankful to the Almighty. "Would that it might but continue ever so!" she inwardly exclaimed. Miriam was in the mean time secretly despatched by Gedaliah to procure some refreshment for her mother, as he had observed that she was faint and weak from long abstinence. Miriam gladly and expeditiously performed her errand, and soon returned followed by Deborah bearing for her mistress's use some of the small remaining stock of cordials, which through Deborah's hands Hadassah had so often of late distributed to the sick and wounded among her poorer neighbours.

Gedaliah having thus seen the most urgent wants of his niece attended to, bade her wait for a few minutes while he went in search of Talmon, that by bringing them together he might make his kind offices available to both at the same time. It was with no little difficulty, and only after much persuasion that he prevailed on Talmon to accompany him back to the apartment where he had left Hadas-

sah. Talmon's habits and society had gradually changed of late, and he was fully conscious that Gedaliah highly disapproved of his altered opinions and practices. He felt that Gedaliah might probably regard the occasion of his present distress in the same light as that in which conscience had already represented it to his own mind, namely as a visitation upon him for his part in the prophet Jeremiah's fate. Reluctantly therefore did he consent to return, in company with Gedaliah, even to the society of her whom once he would never have believed it possible for him to have been willingly absent from in such a season of trial. While Gedaliah had been searching for Talmon, his daughter Berith had rejoined Hadassah, with whom indeed she had spent the greater part of the day since she had first learnt the afflicting tidings of the morning. Formerly she had been much in Hadassah's society, and her father had watched with pleasure the friendship which grew up by degrees between them. Zabad had been almost like a younger brother to Berith, and as children they had been frequent companions and playfellows. Berith therefore felt keenly his sudden and premature end. On hearing of it she hastened without delay to Hadassah's side, that she might render any service in her power to her or Miriam. She had now been despatched by her father to fetch some writings which he thought might possibly be of use to him on this occasion; for he was not without a last faint hope that the present circumstances might even yet with care be made the

means of opening Talmon's mind to conviction and amendment.

"Berith, my child," asked her father, as he entered the chamber with Talmon, "were you able to find the parchments and writings, according to my directions?" "These are they," said Berith, as she presented the roll to her father; "my mother and I found them in the cedar chest, together with the roll of the law." "Right, my child," said Gedaliah, "and what tidings from your mother?" "That she would await your coming till the third watch of the night; but hoped that you would not be absent longer. She bade me also say that a messenger had come to you from Ebedmelech, the king's chamberlain, bringing word that the prophet had been, by the king's consent, removed again from the dungeon to the court of the prison, and that she had sent him a change of raiment and a little food by the young man who brought the intelligence. The numbers, too, have been greater this evening than ever before to beg for water from our cistern; for none, they say, can now be got, except at a great price. She knew not in your absence who they were to whom you had given permission to draw water." "Good, my child. Thy tidings of the prophet are happy tidings; would that the king could as easily rescue his people from the drought and the pestilence! But such things are in higher hands. May He who dwelleth above preserve us!—or His present sore judgments will leave but a small remnant for the enemy."

"Who fears the enemy?" asked Talmon; "or rather, who would have done so, had it not been for the discouragement and disaffection to our country's cause which that self-styled prophet has raised? As, however, the king hath again rescued him from his well-deserved fate, he will no doubt soon find some means of betraying us to the Babylonians." Could the eye of any of that little company have penetrated into Talmon's heart at that moment, they would have seen that, in spite of his boastful language, a great weight had been taken off his conscience by the tidings that the prophet's life was still safe. He had not, it is true, the candour to acknowledge the fact. The force of false shame, lest he should appear to waver even in a bad cause, made him speak in a manner contrary to his real feelings. So deeply had he allowed himself to be entangled in the snares of wicked and hardened men, that their influence even in their absence extended over his actions. He could never banish from his memory what he had once witnessed in the council of the princes on the discovery of one of their confederates' intentions to desert their designs. The cutting sarcasm and reproaches of Seraiah, the sneers and taunts of the other princes, and their malicious imprecations on the head of him who had dared on conscientious grounds to quit their party, and disavow their society—the remembrance of such scenes as this had thrown a shackle over Talmon's mind, which made him dread to betray for a moment symptoms of disaffection to the cause that he had espoused.

Naturally brave and open, and one who would not have feared to meet in fair and honourable contest any of those with whom he had now become thus unhappily associated, yet the effect of their subtle and unprincipled conduct was to bind him to them by a chain of fear and shame far stronger than any fetters of steel.

It had not been Gedaliah's intention to introduce the subject of the prophet's condemnation, or at least not for the present; but the mention made of his rescue by Berith, in delivering her mother's message, had unavoidably occasioned it. To have continued it now would but have been adding fuel to the flames; and instead of alleviating Hadassah's troubles, as her uncle desired to do, it would probably have increased them. Accordingly seating himself near Hadassah and Berith, on one of the low couches or cushions with which the upper end of the apartment was furnished, he reminded Berith that it was now their usual hour for the evening reading of the law; and then addressing himself to Talmon and Hadassah successively, he asked if they would be willing that he and Berith should do as it was their custom to do when at their own home. Their consent having been given, Gedaliah opened the roll, and having entreated GOD'S blessing on their endeavours, he placed it in Berith's hand, and bade her read aloud the passage at which he had opened. It was the account of Jacob's bitter sorrow for the supposed death of his son Joseph, when the well known coat of many colours was brought back to the distressed father, torn and bathed in

blood, and he was asked by his unnatural sons to pronounce the sentence of his own woe—"Know now whether this be thy son's coat or no."

When the narrative was concluded, Gedaliah called their attention to the fact of GOD's most faithful servants having been thus in all ages subject, in youth as well as in old age, to trials and calamities of sundry kinds. "Behold," said he, "the aged father deprived of his favourite son, the most pious and affectionate of his children—that son meanwhile, though not, as his father supposed, dead, yet sold as a slave, and toiling in a foreign country, and exposed to the temptations and hardships of a stranger's hapless lot. And though he was restored, after many years, as it were, from death to his father's arms, yet how must it have diminished Jacob's happiness, even at such an hour, to have discovered that his own children had been the wilful cause of so much misery to their father. And shall our forefather Jacob have had such trials to bear," said Gedaliah, "and shall we hope to escape altogether without them? Perhaps, too," he added, "GOD saw it needful that Jacob should be thus chastened, that his faith might be proved: probably GOD had seen no sufficient penitence in Jacob's heart for his undutiful conduct to his own father Isaac. We know not always why GOD sends us grief; but we know that it is written, 'He is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works;' and again, that 'it is good for us to be afflicted that we may learn His statutes.'

"But take the other roll, my daughter," said

her father to Berith, "and read the portion which I have opened." Berith again began reading, in a clear and gentle tone of voice, the history of the patriarch Job—his wealth—his numerous flocks—his sons and his daughters—all in one day snatched from him, more quickly than the messengers of such evil tidings could report their several losses. "Yet," said Gedaliah, "Job had not forgotten to entreat GOD in behalf of himself and his children. While they were feasting, he was preparing sacrifices to sanctify them. But GOD gave to Job the honourable distinction of standing forth as an example of patient integrity to take away occasion from the gainsayers of blaspheming that holy name. And may we not learn in every calamity," asked Gedaliah, looking affectionately towards Talmon, "thus to glorify our GOD? And is not that GOD a just GOD? If He afflicts those who serve Him most faithfully, has He not power still left to compensate for all such inequalities? Tell me," said her uncle, addressing Miriam, "was the first man upon whom death fell in this world a good man or a wicked one?" Miriam, after a moment's thought, replied, "Abel was the first who died, uncle. The law says that Abel's offering was pleasing to GOD; and therefore I think he must have been a good man." "And how then," said Gedaliah next, to Berith, "did GOD act justly to Abel in suffering him to be killed, and Cain, his wicked brother, to live? Do you recollect, my child, how the holy doctors of the law have explained this to us?" "Because," answered Berith, "GOD took Abel to

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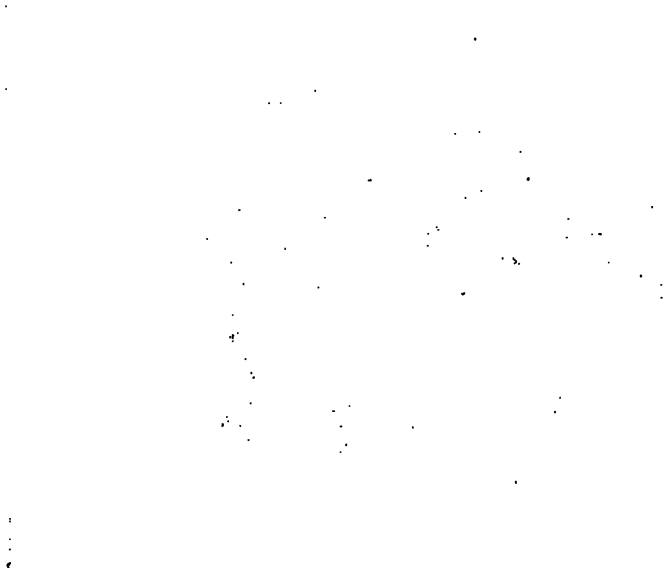


Himself, and left Cain on earth to see if he would bear his punishment patiently, and repent of his sin." "And are there not some, my children," continued Gedaliah, "whom the law or the prophets tell us that GOD took openly to Himself?" "Even so, my father," answered Berith; "Enoch the son of Jared, and Elijah the prophet." "And if Abel, Enoch, and Elijah be with GOD," said Gedaliah, "why may not others too who have found favour in His sight? And if so, shall we do well to grieve on their account? If it be our loss that they are taken, is it not their gain? For can we doubt that it is better to be with GOD than to continue in this world of sin and sorrow?"

"And why," said Gedaliah, directing his words now more expressly to Talmon, "why should we be slow to believe, as some are, that man's spirit is by GOD designed for a better state after it has left its frail earthly tenement? Was not man made at first to be immortal? And was he not intended to have eaten of the tree of life, and to have lived for ever, had not our first forefather disobeyed GOD's commands? And when GOD forgave man for the sake of that promised Deliverer, who shall some day spring from our favoured nation, what did such forgiveness mean? Was it that he should live for some few years longer in this world? If so, then Cain's lot was a better one than Abel's. Surely GOD's gracious gift and promise, 'that the woman's seed should bruise the serpent's head,' must have meant something more than this. May it not be," said Gedaliah, his eyes kindling, and his counte-

nance beaming with holy hope, as he spoke, "may it not be that when that promised Deliverer shall have come—He who is to be the 'Prince of Peace,' in whom 'all the nations of the earth are to be blessed,' may it not be that all who have found favour in GOD'S sight, wherever He may have placed them in the mean time, shall then be allowed to eat of that tree of life, and to live for ever in His presence, as the holy angels who minister unto Him?

"May we not then reasonably look forward, if we but find similar favour before GOD, to be united again with those who have gone before us? parents with children, husbands with wives, the betrothed with the promised partner of life—never again to be separated, nor to be subject to sin or its attendant sorrows? We may surely, as the prophet David said, in like circumstances, hope, by GOD'S good providence, to be allowed to rejoin them, though they cannot return to us."

CHAPTER XIII.

"But after taking a full view of this troublous state of things, turn to the prophets: see what they had already disclosed and were continuing to disclose, both concerning the Pagan kingdoms, and in their renewed and enlarged promises of the Gospel dispensation. All that revelation which showed GOD'S controlling power over those kingdoms, proving them to be the regulated instruments of His providence and marking the appointed periods, the particular rise and fall of many of them: all that other revelation which discovered the prospect of the Gospel and opened more largely its doctrines and mercies, were fitted in union to support the cause of religion and to administer consolation and instruction to the minds of men who were willing to seek it. It is plain that the prophetic revelation at this great era of it corresponded to the difficulties, perhaps I might say the decays, of the Jewish covenant. When the apparent visible ruins of the elder dispensations were most likely to perplex and alarm, Paganism could not triumph—the Gospel could not be despaired of. In the very heart of the captivity, in the abyss of the Babylonian bondage, Daniel weighed and numbered the kingdoms of the earth. There also he measured the years to the death of the MESSIAH, and marked the place of order assigned in the succession of the empires of the world to the establishment of His Kingdom. Great and instructive revelations, fitted alike to uphold the Jewish religion and to sustain the expectation and complete the prophetic evidence of the Christian."—DAVISON *On Prophecy*, Disc. vi. pt. 3.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Let grief be her own mistress still—
She loveth her own anguish deep
More than much pleasure. Let her will
Be done—to weep or not to weep."
TENNYSON. Vol. I. p. 216.

HER father's few last words had caused a tear to start suddenly into Berith's eye. It had been the sight of her, indeed, which had almost involuntarily suggested to Gedaliah's mind the idea that now so keenly affected her; and the expression had escaped his lips, ere he had time to think of the pang which it might occasion. But he saw that it was now too late either to recall the words, or to hope to prevent the consequences of their having been used. His daughter Berith had been betrothed to a youthful kinsman of Talmon's, and the time for their espousals had been fixed for the feast of Tabernacles of the present year. Berith, with youthful ardour, had been sanguine in her hopes, and had counted the months with impatience since the first week of Abib. Often had she anxiously conversed

with Hadassah on the probability of the siege soon being terminated. At each return of her beloved Abdiel from his post on the city walls, or from any sally on the besiegers, she reckoned one more of his allotted dangers to be over. But into Abdiel's mind the prophet's warning had sunk deeply; and his own intimacy with Gedaliah had been among the means of convincing him that, in opposing the Babylonian army, patriotic as it might sound, they were not fighting the LORD'S battle. Much less by reviling and slandering the prophet himself, could they be paying the respect or reverence due to Him whose accredited ambassador that prophet was. These, his deliberate sentiments, he had ventured to express in the council of the princes; and though he refused not to continue still in command of his allotted post, yet he boldly declared his intention of withdrawing from or opposing any schemes of personal hostility or persecution that might be directed against the prophet. For this had those keen reproaches and menaces been levelled against him by the wily Seraiah—reproaches, the memory of which still held even a mind like Talmon's in terror; and menaces, which at length intrigue and malice found means of accomplishing to the full. On every attack or occasion of more than ordinary danger Abdiel was, by Seraiah's means, constantly despatched; and though Seraiah was far too sagacious to think that his schemes could remain unobserved by his victim, yet he was equally sure that Abdiel's noble and generous spirit would not allow him to

shrink from any such dangers, however unjust his portion of them, compared with that of his comrades, might be.

In this Seraiah had judged rightly. At each fresh command, whether it were to withdraw the last prop that supported a subterranean mine, or to apply fire to the enemy's engines of war, or to attack them in their very encampment, Abdiel was ever singled out to conduct the enterprise; and again and again he came off successful, not only to his own surprise but to that also of Seraiah and his accomplices.

Their stratagem, however, at length took effect. Abdiel, in a sudden skirmish, was taken prisoner, and Berith's hopes were blighted in the bud. One pang she was spared. Her eyes had not been obliged to witness, as those of Talmon had done, the mutilated body of the brave Abdiel suspended, like that of a felon, from a gibbet, in the most conspicuous place which the enemy could select before the city walls.* Of this fact she had been kindly kept in ignorance; but the irreparable loss of one so deservedly dear to her, in whom her warmest feelings had been from early years wrapt up, and when now, as she had vainly hoped, her long-cherished wishes were on the point of being fulfilled, all these circumstances together proved a trial almost beyond Berith's utmost fortitude. The mention or the thought of her loss was ever sure to open the bleeding wounds of her heart

* See Lam. v. 12.

afresh, as had now accidentally happened by her father's allusion, among his topics of consolation, to the prospect that those betrothed might yet hope to meet again though not in this life. Even, previous to her father's allusion, the circumstances of Zabad's death had brought the past more vividly to her mind that day; but at this additional mention of it, her tears flowed fast in spite of all her endeavours to suppress them. Talmon quickly penetrated the cause of her grief. Accordingly, changing his position, which had been purposely rather distant from the rest of the little circle, and approaching Berith, with a heart full of sympathy for her distress, he endeavoured to soothe her and direct her mind to other subjects. He and Hadassah, as well as Miriam, almost forgot their own sorrows for the moment while endeavouring to console a fellow-sufferer.

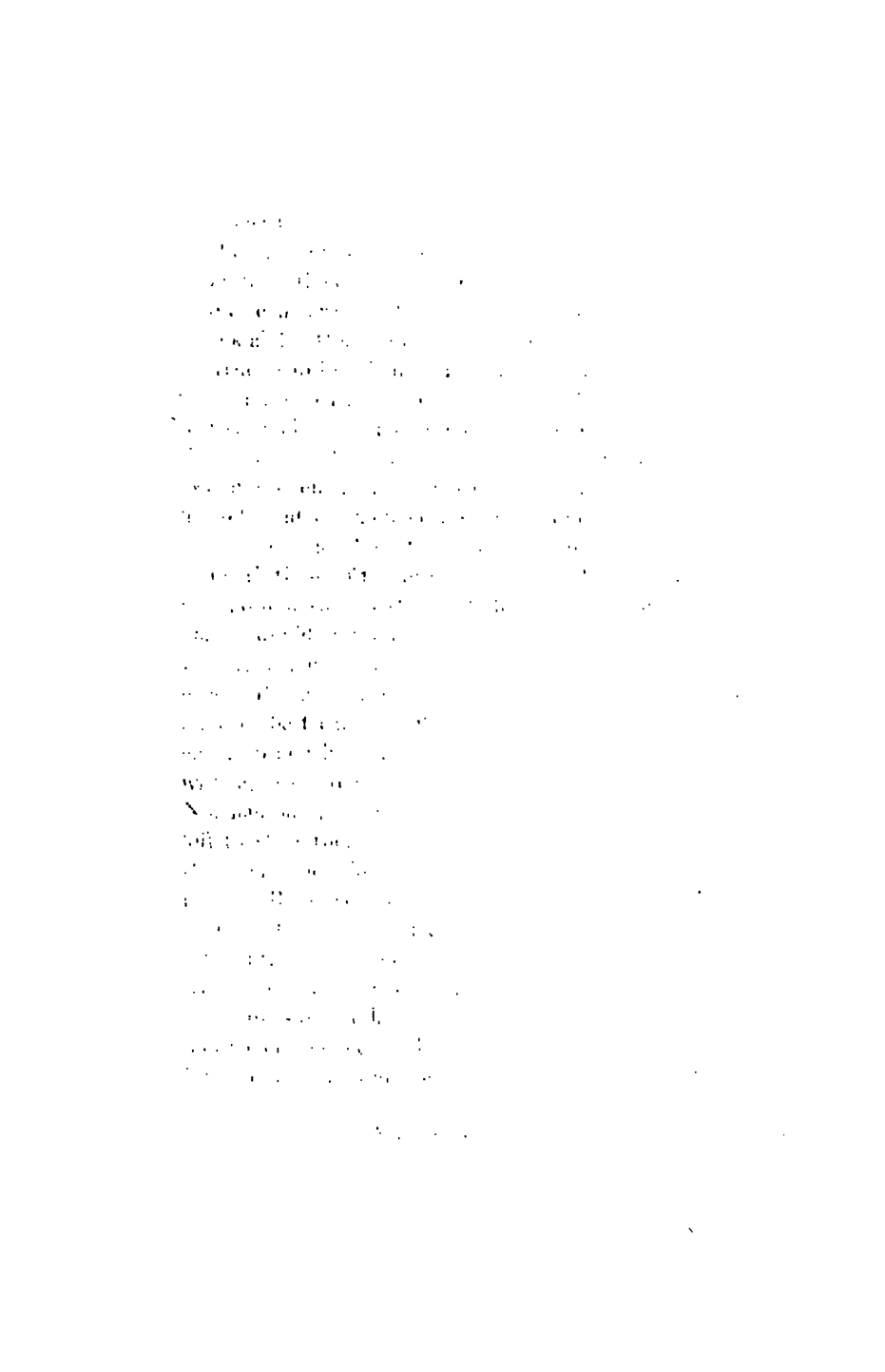
Gedaliah felt with all a father's heart for his only daughter; and it was not without an inward struggle, such as nothing but a strong sense of duty could have urged him to make, that he resisted his feelings and checked the yielding spirit within. But with regard to one of those now assembled before him, he saw clearly that the moment was a critical one, and one which, if he omitted to take advantage of, he should be guilty of serious neglect. He observed that Talmon's heart was melted and softened by grief, partly his own, partly that of another. It immediately suggested itself to Gedaliah, that if Talmon was ever again to be impressed with the sentiments which

he had of late so utterly abandoned, the present was perhaps the most favourable occasion that could be expected for instilling them. A few words from her father soon recalled Berith to her former tranquil, and, as far as circumstances would admit, cheerful temperament; and Gedaliah lost not for a moment the opportunity thus offered him.

The younger children had retired with Deborah. All was still and peaceful as far as the outward senses were concerned; and to Hadassah herself, perhaps, silence, together with the consciousness of being in the society of those now around her, would have been the most soothing and agreeable condition for the present. But she observed that Gedaliah had already unrolled some of the parchments which he had lately sent Berith to fetch for him from his dwelling; and that, as he arranged them so as best to catch the light of the lamp, he was preparing to make some remark upon their contents. "Of a truth these are times of reproach and of affliction," said he, looking around to see if their attention was awakened; "but can we doubt why the LORD thinks fit to send such times upon us? Once this our favoured city might have defied the hosts of the heathen. The virgin of Judah might have laughed them to scorn. But then she was really in GOD'S sight a virgin, chaste and faithful. Now she hath espoused herself to the gods of the nations around us. In those days the tribes came unto Jerusalem, and thrice in each

year, as our law enjoined, all appeared before the LORD in His holy temple. Nor did the enemies dare approach our land during their absence. It was safe in all its borders from Dan even to Beersheba. In those days our land enjoyed her sabbaths, and her children dwelt securely. Oh that our GOD would renew our days as of old."—"Would that it were His will," said Talmon. "And why may it not even yet be so?" he continued. "Is not the temple yet with us? And were we not in the days of Hezekiah delivered when a mightier host than the present was brought by Sennacherib to our gates? Did not sudden destruction come upon our foes, and in one night slay the flower and strength of their armies? And why may it not be so even this night?"

This, though an argument often used before by Talmon, was spoken in an altered tone and manner; and Gedaliah perceived that what he had been anxiously watching for was, at least for a short time, likely to be the case. Talmon's heart was open to better impressions. With regard to such arguments in general, coupled as they had been with the blind assurance of GOD'S protecting the Temple, and with reliance on succours from Egypt, such Gedaliah well knew had been the favourite topics of the false prophets who had been suborned by the princes to engage the populace on their side; and Talmon had so exclusively of late confined himself to their society that he had insensibly grown into a belief, or at least adoption, of the



same ideas with them. Thus deceit, originally practised on others, had at length recoiled on himself. "Can it be the case," said Gedaliah, "that we venture to compare our times with those of the pious Hezekiah? Hezekiah had restored the worship of the true GOD in His holy Temple, had banished the idols of the heathen, had rebuilt the altars of JEHOVAH, and had made them flow, as of old, with the blood of the wonted sacrifices and offerings. When the enemy approached, Hezekiah humbled himself, and commended his people and himself to the care of the Most High, with his own prayers and with those of the prophet Isaiah. Would that he who now sits, as Hezekiah did, on the throne of David, would but do the same! and then possibly we might hope for a like deliverance from our dangers. But how have our kings allowed GOD's prophet to be treated? Was it not Jehoiakim who contemptuously cut the roll of the prophet's writings to shreds, and cast them to the flames? Nor had our princes who beheld it shame enough left to show their horror at such sacrilege. Was there one who, like Hezekiah when he received the letter of Rabshakeh, rent his garment at that sight,* or proved himself 'valiant for the truth?' How different, alas! from our great lawgiver Moses, who, in his zeal for GOD's honour, dashed even the two tables of the law in pieces at the sight of the idol which the people had set up! Truly we, our kings, our princes, and our people have transgressed

* Jer. xxxvi. 24.

against the Holy One of Israel. Neither His priests nor His prophets have we honoured. In the very courts of His temple have we not sacrificed His priests to our fury? Does not the blood of the righteous Zechariah, the son of the patriotic Jehoiada, whom for his fidelity the people stoned to death before the altar, still cry out against us? and, according to his dying words of warning, does not the LORD now look upon such deeds, and require their atonement at our hands? Therefore hath He sent us 'evil pastors, who have devoured His people's pastures, and have fouled and trodden down the residue with their feet.'* And if our GOD hath delivered us even to-day from one more act of blood-guiltiness, rescuing His prophet from the dungeon by the hands of a stranger, (oh! shame to us that such an act should have been left for a stranger to do,) yet what satisfaction can we make for those who have already fallen—for the life of the prophet Urijah, who was dragged even from Egypt that his blood might stain the stones of our guilty city? Have we ever humbled ourselves before the LORD with fasting and sackcloth for these our evil deeds? Since the days of our pious king Josiah have we not gone on from one wickedness to another? And can we wonder if the Most High visit all these things upon us? When the princes of Ammon despised and ill-treated the ambassadors of David did they not 'stink in his sight?' and did he not take vengeance upon them and upon

* Ezekiel xxxiv. 18.

Rabbah, the proud city of waters?* And will the King of heaven allow His ambassadors to be ill-treated, even to death, and leave the doers of such things unpunished? And how again, even in this the day of the LORD'S vengeance, have we broken our vows! If the land cannot raise her voice, and cry out for her appointed rests and sabbaths, of which we have deprived her, yet surely the voice of our brethren whom we have oppressed and enslaved will reach the throne of heaven. The bondmen whom we released on pretence of keeping this holy sabbatic year, have we not treacherously seized again and bound with double fetters?"

Gedaliah was not aware how painful a subject to Talmon's conscience he was now touching upon. In speaking before of the prophet he had intentionally made his observations in some degree general, that they might fall the less keenly upon Talmon's ear; but now he was not conscious of any such reason for caution, and accordingly he spoke, as he felt, most warmly in behalf of his unfortunate fellow countrymen. His seasonable interposition had, at an earlier stage, procured them a temporary release; but they had all, like the hapless Benoni, been given up again by the treacherous cruelty of the princes to their former bondmasters on the occasion of the besiegers' departing for a short time from beneath the walls.

"And are not the prophetic words which he then denounced upon our city," continued Gedaliah,

* 2 Sam. x. 6.

"fully accomplished upon us, that as we had refused liberty to our fellow men, so GOD would give 'liberty against us to the sword, the pestilence, and the famine?' "*

On any former occasion, and until his feelings had been, as on that day, painfully tried and convinced by his own loss, this last argument might possibly have had but little weight in Talmon's mind. To some persons the misfortunes of others seem to be no warnings. The shaft must strike home to their own hearts before they will either believe themselves to be vulnerable, or acknowledge the necessity of precaution. But the events of the last few hours had brought sure though late conviction to Talmon that GOD indeed had, without respect of persons, let loose the arrows of His anger against His people. During a pause of a few moments, which Gedaliah allowed to occur that he might the better watch the effect of his preceding words, Talmon sighed deeply, and it seemed now to Gedaliah a fit time to introduce another argument intended to remedy any defect of evidence which Talmon's prejudice against the prophet Jeremiah might, however unreasonably, have occasioned.

"And now," said Gedaliah, "let him that doubts the words of that prophet who has been so unjustly treated by us, hearken to the declarations of the Most High by the mouth of another of His messengers. Behold the volume of the LORD'S words

* Jer. xxxiv. 17.

which He hath spoken by the mouth of His servant Ezekiel. These valued parchments," he continued, as he held them up to their view, "were given me but lately by my neighbour, and the protector of my youth, the aged Buzi, the father of Ezekiel. But they are not unknown in our city. Would that more of us cared to procure for themselves writings of them, or to listen to them when proclaimed in the courts of the Temple by the prophets who are among us. Ezekiel has been raised up among our brethren who are already prisoners to the king of Babylon. Snatched, as you know, in his youth from his aged father's arms, and carried away by our foes, yet to him, in his captive abode by the river Chebar, it has been granted to witness and record the bright manifestations of the SPIRIT of GOD. After many other sights of wonder and of awe, 'A hand,' he says, 'was sent unto him, and lo! a roll of a book was therein, * * * and it was written within and without; and there was written therein lamentations, and mourning, and woe.'* And verily these woes are thickly scattered over the prophet's writings. Hear me while I give you but a sample of their bitter tidings." Hadassah listened in breathless attention while Gedaliah read as follows:—"'Son of man, write thee the name of the day, even of this same day; the king of Babylon set himself against Jerusalem this same day. And utter a parable unto the rebellious house, and say unto them, Thus saith the LORD

* Ezek. ii. 9.

God, Set on a pot, set it on, and also pour the water into it: gather the pieces thereof into it, even every good piece, the thigh and the shoulder; fill it with the choice bones. Take the choice of the flock and burn also the bones under it, and make it boil well, and let them seethe the bones of it therein. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Woe to the bloody city, to the pot whose scum is therein, and whose scum is not gone out of it! bring it out piece by piece, let no lot fall upon it. For her blood is in the midst of her: she set it upon the top of a rock; she poured it not upon the ground to cover it with dust, that it may cause fury to come up to take vengeance; I have set her blood upon the top of a rock that it should not be covered. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Woe to the bloody city! I will even make the pile for fire great. Heap on wood, kindle the fire, consume the flesh, and spice it well, and let the bones be burned. Then set it empty upon the coals thereof, that the brass of it may be hot, and may burn, and that the filthiness of it may be molten in it, and that the scum of it may be consumed. She hath wearied herself with lies, and her great scum went not forth out of her; her scum shall be in the fire. In thy filthiness is lewdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused My fury to rest upon thee. I the Lord have spoken it: it shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent: according to thy ways and according

to thy doings shall they judge thee, saith the LORD GOD."*

"Oh that such a curse should have been pronounced against our once holy city," said Gedaliah, as he concluded reading; "and to make the vision true, and the interpretation thereof sure, again and again is it repeated. Hear me once more; 'Son of man, the house of Israel is to Me become dross; all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of the silver. Therefore thus saith the LORD GOD, Because ye are all become dross, behold, therefore, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin into the midst of the furnace to blow the fire upon it to melt it; so will I gather you in Mine anger and in My fury, and I will leave you there and melt you. Yea, I will gather you and blow upon you in the fire of My wrath, and ye shall be melted in the

* The figures and metaphors here employed, though perhaps they may sound somewhat strange and undignified to us, must have been very impressive and appropriate when addressed to those who were constantly in the habit of witnessing the sacrificial rites of the temple. It is evidently from these rites that the figures are borrowed. The "good pieces," the "chief joints," the "choice of the flock," are the great men of Jerusalem. The useless bones which the coals would consume show the general destruction of the meaner sort which would be caused by the Chaldeans. Scum denotes wickedness. The burning of the bones and of the pot denotes GOD's judgments not only on the inhabitants but on the city.—See ARCHBISHOP NEWCOME *on Ezekiel*, chap. 24.

midst thereof. As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so shall ye be melted in the midst thereof, and ye shall know that I the LORD have poured out My fury upon you.'

"And is not this word," asked Gedaliah, "already fulfilled upon us? Are we not shut in here together as the metal in a furnace—our countrymen from far and near, from the tower of the watchman and from the fenced cities, all driven hither from their homes, only to suffer the straitness of the siege, and to meet death by the sword or by the famine in our city? And yet do we not still refuse to be humbled? Do we not still set up altars to other gods, even the gods of the nations round about us? Why not rather, if we would hope for deliverance as in the days of Hezekiah—why not walk in the ways of Hezekiah,* and purify ourselves from such abominations against our GOD? Why do we not renew His altars, and observe His sabbaths, and cease from oppressing our brethren? So may our GOD haply turn again, and we may find grace in His sight. It may be that it is not even yet too late. For what saith the LORD in this matter?" asked Gedaliah, taking up in its turn the roll of the prophecy of Jeremiah; "'O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?† * * * At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation, against whom

* Jer. xxvi. 19. † Jer. xviii.

I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.'

"And let us remember and forget not how long our GOD hath waited for us, and hath spoken to us by His servants, rising up early and sending them, until His very long suffering has been made a byword among us, while it is impiously said that 'the days are prolonged and every vision faileth.'*

"Berith, my child, it was in the year wherein thou wast born unto me, in the days of our king Jehoiakim, when in the ninth month, on the occasion of a solemn fast being proclaimed through all Judah, the prophet's warning words were published in the assembly of the people.† Greatly did thy mother and I rejoice that such days of piety seemed at hand to welcome the arrival of our first-born child, and we named thee Berith,‡ in remembrance of the covenant then renewed between GOD and His people.

"We trusted that the good days of Josiah were again to be renewed. Woe, woe is us that so fair a springtide should have been followed by so barren a summer. Though near a score of years since then has been added to the season of our trial, yet are not the prophet's words now more true than ever? 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.'§ Oh that we had but

* Jer. xii. 22. † Jer. xxxvi. 9.

‡ Berith in the Hebrew language signifying Covenant.

§ Jer. viii. 20.

followed his counsels, when on that day his words were heard by the assembled thousands of Judah in the courts of the LORD'S temple. From morning till night did Baruch, at the window of the chamber of Gemariah, read in the ears of the people GOD'S warnings and threatenings which He had commanded the prophet to record. Never will it be effaced from the tablets of my memory, the shudder which thrilled through my bones as I first heard the solemn denunciation that this place of GOD'S chosen city and temple should be as Shiloh."

"What sayest thou, my father?" asked Berith. "Was it that Shiloh, in the tribe of Ephraim, of which thou speakest, where we beheld the ruined streets and roofless houses—where were the broken cisterns, with the scorpions' nests, and the vineyards destroyed by the wild foxes? Was it not thence that we were returning at eventide when we were so frightened by the howling of the wolves, and where the shepherd told Miriam that he had lost three kids of the flock the night before, as they were returning to the fold? Was this the Shiloh, of which thou spakest, my father?"

"Even the same, my child," answered Gedaliah, who had not failed, in obedience to the divine command,* to impress upon his own mind and upon that of his children the lesson to be learnt by witnessing with their own eyes the marks of GOD'S wrath upon the places which had formerly offended

* Jer. vii. 12.

Him. "And even such it is that the prophet's words, as Baruch proclaimed them in the ears of the people, have forewarned us that this place shall be, if we turn not from our evil ways."—"But why," asked Berith, "did Baruch, and not the prophet himself declare those words to the people?"—"The prophet was even then," replied her father, "a prisoner and in bonds. Long, indeed, has he eaten the bread of affliction. He has been the scorn of the profane, and the object of persecution among the powerful. It is thus that we have treated him instead of following his faithful counsels."—"And is it possible," said Talmon, who had unconsciously imbibed many of the ideas of the scoffers with whom he had lately associated, "is it possible that GOD governs all the actions and fortunes of men, and that too, as you say, according to strict justice, if He suffers one, whom you own to be so faithful as the prophet, to receive such treatment throughout his life? Must it not be, as some say, 'that the LORD doth neither good nor evil,'* that He cares not for men or their doings? Can He regard such things at all? or if so can He be just? This very Nebuchadnezzar, whose hosts surround our walls, is he not himself, with all his people, a worshipper of Bel? Was not Josiah, our righteous king, overcome and slain by the idolatrous Egyptian? How then are GOD'S ways equal? or how is His providence manifested? and why should we obey the prophet and yield

* Zephaniah i. 12. See also Lam. iii. 38.

ourselves as slaves and cowards into the hands of these proud Babylonians?"

Gedaliah was pained to hear such sentiments from one who, in earlier days, would have shuddered to have given utterance to them; but it was still some comfort to find that, though the arguments were those of the unprincipled companions with whom he had lately associated, yet the manner in which they were uttered on the present occasion was that of Talmon in former and happier years. It brought back to Gedaliah's mind the remembrance of times when at the feet of his father Ahikam, he and Talmon in their youth used to listen to tales from the earlier history of GOD'S chosen people—when it was the delight of his pious father to hear and answer the simple and childlike questions that each was encouraged to ask respecting GOD'S wonderful deliverances of His people from Egypt, from the nations of Canaan, from the treachery of Balaam, and the hostile army of the Moabites. It was the remains of such impressions thus stamped on his youthful mind, which Gedaliah saw were now struggling for the mastery with the evil bias that had lately warped Talmon's judgment.

Hadassah, too, was anxiously watching the effect which her uncle's words might now take upon him; for she well knew that her own probably would be of but little avail if Gedaliah's proved fruitless, and especially if the present opportunity passed by without producing a change. Once more therefore Gedaliah determined to shake, if

possible, the strongholds of sophistry and falsehood which evil times and ill advisers had combined to build up in the mind of his kinsman.

"Can Talmon have forgotten," asked Gedaliah, "the mighty deeds which GOD at sundry times hath wrought for our nation? For ask of the days that are past, which were before us, since the day that GOD created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven to the other, whether GOD hath ever assayed to go and take any nation, except our own, from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors. I am asking," said Gedaliah, "in the very words of our lawgiver Moses; but we have seen many other and great things done for us since his days. If GOD had not cared for us at that time, could we have done what we have done? Could we have subdued those nations greater and mightier than ourselves, who possessed the land before us? Could any arm of man have caused that the walls of Jericho should, at the mere sound of our trumpets, fall down to give us entrance? Was it without GOD's special providence that the sun hasted not to go down for a whole day, while our leader Joshua slew the Amorites? Was it at the command of man that Jordan ceased to roll his waters onward and was arrested even in the overflowings of his harvest stream? Or in later times, as thou thyself hast reminded us, that Sennacherib's proud host perished beneath our walls? Did these things indeed come to pass without the know-

ledge and consent of Him of whom it is now profanely said that 'He doeth neither good nor evil;' that 'He hath forgotten;' that 'He hideth His face;' that 'He seeth not, neither regardeth?'

"And touching these nations around us, who are now combined for our injury, is it without the permission of the Most High that they are come—permission not asked, and granted to worshippers and servants of that GOD, for such indeed they are not, but permission by which they are suffered to follow their own evil ways, so long as it seems good to the Almighty, and so long as they are found to be furthering His wise counsels? For He, and He only, bringeth good out of evil, and light out of darkness. Hath He not declared the same by His prophets, in the days of that very Sennacherib?" And Gedaliah, again opening the roll of Isaiah's writings, continued, "What was the answer of the LORD to the haughty boastings of the Assyrian?

'Hast thou not heard of old that I have disposed it?
And of ancient times that I have formed it?
Now have I brought it to pass that thou shouldest be to lay waste
Warlike nations, strong-fenced cities.
Therefore were their inhabitants of small strength, they were dismayed and confounded;
They were as the grass of the field and as the green herb;
The grass of the house top, and as the corn blasted before it groweth up.
But thy sitting down and thy going out, and thy coming in,
And thy rage against Me, I have known.
Because thy rage against Me and thy insolence is come up into Mine ears;

Therefore will I put My hook in thy nose and My bridle in thy jaws;
And I will turn thee back by the way in which thou camest.'*

"How it pleased the Almighty to accomplish His word in this matter we well know. And if," continued Gedaliah, "we ascend the stream of time to the days of our forefathers, hath it not been ever so? How fared the Egyptian nation at the hand of our GOD? If, for a time, it appeared to any that the groanings of our people under their hard taskmasters were forgotten and disregarded, by the GOD of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob; yet did not the end when it came to pass justify GOD's dealings? As the cup of Egyptian iniquity became full, so also did the cup of the Divine wrath; and He made them drink of it even to the dregs. Pharaoh thought to defy and thwart the counsels of the GOD of Israel; but the LORD by that very resistance gat Him honour upon Pharaoh and all his host; and neighbouring nations heard and trembled at so mighty a GOD. And so, doubtless, it shall be with these our idolatrous and godless foes. Though they are now doing GOD's work, unconscious and unintentionally, yet for their own sins, if they repent not of them, they shall suffer, as nations, the vengeance of the GOD of heaven. Hearken," said Gedaliah, "to the words of the prophet Isaiah, who has been long since gathered to his fathers:—

* Isaiah xxxvii. (Lowth's translation.)

'Bel boweth down, Nebo croucheth;
Their idols are laid on the beasts and the cattle.
Their burthens are heavy, a grievous weight to the weary beast.
They crouched, they bowed down together:
They could not deliver their own charge;
Even they themselves are gone into captivity.'*

'Descend and sit on the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon,
Sit on the bare ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans;
For thou shalt no longer be called the tender and the delicate.
Take the mill and grind the corn.
Uncover thy locks, disclose thy flowing hair;
Make bare thy leg, wade through the rivers.
Thy nakedness shall be uncovered; even thy shame shall be seen.
I will take full vengeance; neither will I suffer man to intercede with Me.
Our avenger, JEHOVAH, GOD of hosts,
The Holy One of Israel is His name!
Sit thou in silence, go into darkness, O daughter of the Chaldeans,
For thou shalt no longer be called the lady of the kingdoms.

* * * *

And thou saidst, I shall be a lady for ever:
Because thou didst not attentively consider these things;
Thou didst not think on what was in the end to befall thee.
'But hear thou this, O thou voluptuous that sittest in security;
Thou sayest in thy heart, I am, and there is none else;
I shall not sit a widow; I shall not know the loss of children.
Yet shall these two things come upon thee in a moment;
In one day loss of children and widowhood;

* Isaiah xlvi.

On a sudden shall they come upon thee,
Notwithstanding the multitude of thy sorceries and the great strength of thy enchantments.'*

"But time would fail me, if I were to speak of the LORD'S fearful threatenings against Moab, against Edom, against all those who are now rejoicing, not at the punishment of our transgressions, but at our destruction; and at the dishonour done, as they deem it, to our GOD, whose name they have so long despised and blasphemed. Long might I ponder on these gracious revelations and warnings to us His disobedient servants. Fain would I soar on the wings of the prophetic spirit, and behold the dark clouds of superstition and idolatry dispelled before the just vengeance of our GOD, and driven from nation after nation, till those glorious days shall come when the knowledge of the true GOD shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Oh that I might dwell unceasingly on these glorious prospects! But alas, woe is at our doors; and the night now waneth apace; yet bear with me, Talmon; it may be we shall not often again have the opportunity of taking counsel together.

"Consider, therefore, is it not clear why GOD allows a wicked nation to triumph for a while? Is it not that their sins may be the more manifest to all men? Is it not that after so many warnings they may themselves be obliged to confess the justice of their punishment—a punishment so long

* Isaiah xlvii. (Lowth's translation.)

suspended, and even to the last not inevitable if there be but repentance and amendment? Even the great Nineveh might still have been standing, had she not turned aside and gone back a second time to her sins. Oh, never let us then thus abuse the mercies of GOD by charging Him with forgetfulness for His very forbearance. If there be good, or if there be evil in a city, if prosperity shine upon it, or the dark cloud of adversity overshadow it, whichever be its fate, be sure it is the LORD who hath done it.*

"And if perchance it appear to us that towards any of His more faithful servants, such as king Josiah in former times, or to the prophet Jeremiah in our own day, our GOD acts not according to His usual rules of justice, hear me yet one moment longer. If the GOD of heaven, who ruleth over all the kingdoms of the earth, hath gathered mankind into nations and peoples, hath He not meant it to be a source of blessings and great privileges to His creatures? As in the bosom of each family we find mutual sympathy between its members, each helping, pleasing, protecting the others, united in common interests, and supplying each other's deficiencies or wants, is it not so with nations too? Beyond what each can do for himself, he moreover enjoys many privileges as a member, however humble, of the great family of his nation. If, therefore, his nation sin he must share in the common punishment of that sin, as he

* See Amos iii. 6.

DANIEL. PER PAGE 233.

has shared in the common benefits of the national prosperity. But whatever he may thus suffer as a righteous member of an unrighteous people, cannot GOD fully repay him for it, in the same manner as we trust He did from the beginning to righteous Abel, by taking such a one unto Himself, and making his spirit, when it returns to Him, a companion of the holy angels around His throne? And if we ponder the matter in our heart, is not this very thing a further proof that our GOD hath in store for us a future state where we shall meet again, not as now in sin and infirmity, but such as our forefather was, pure, uncorrupt, and guileless?

"Why then wonder, if some of GOD's more faithful servants suffer tribulation now? They are thereby, doubtless, working GOD's purposes, and He will repay them in His own good time. Believe me, Talmon, as the LORD liveth, in whom I trust, it is with no irreverent eye that I have endeavoured to look into these deep mysteries of GOD's counsels. 'The secret things belong unto the LORD;' but if He has graciously revealed aught, even in types and shadows to us, shall not the eye of faith gaze upon it, and endeavour, though with awe, to search out its meaning? And surely it cannot be unknown to Talmon what wondrous prophecies of future times have been vouchsafed in our own days to our kinsman Daniel, whose wisdom is proclaimed to the uttermost borders of the land, from the river even unto the sea. By him the LORD hath declared not only the speedy fall of the victorious Babylon, but He hath, moreover,

spoken clearly of a kingdom to be set up in future days by the GOD of heaven Himself—a 'kingdom that shall fill the whole earth, and which shall never be destroyed.' Let such prospects and promises of future glory, Talmon, be thy support in this hour of distress, as I have ever endeavoured to make them my stay and consolation. For the present, think whether our city does not deserve punishment; and if so, let us bow our necks and submit to it. If we seek unto our GOD He will even yet 'in judgment remember mercy.' Behold the wife of thy bosom, and the children yet spared to thee; and for their sake let us strive by all means to turn away the fierce anger of GOD from our city and from ourselves. As for me, I will not cease to entreat the LORD for thee, and for them, and for all our people. 'Even now, O LORD, according to all Thy righteousness, I beseech Thee, let Thine anger and Thy fury be turned away from Thy city, Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us. Now, therefore, O our GOD, hear the prayer of Thy servant, and his supplications, and cause Thy face to shine upon Thy sanctuary.'* 'Have mercy upon us, O LORD GOD of all, and behold us: and send Thy fear upon all the nations that seek not after Thee. Lift up Thy hand against the strange nations, and let them see Thy power. As Thou wast sanctified in us before

* Daniel ix. 16.

them, so be Thou magnified among them before us. And let them know Thee as we have known Thee, that there is no GOD but only Thou, O GOD. Show new signs, and make other strange wonders: glorify Thy hand, and Thy right arm, that they may set forth Thy wondrous works. Raise up indignation and pour out wrath: take away the adversary and destroy the enemy. Make the time short, remember the covenant, and let them declare Thy wonderful works: smite in sunder the heads of the rulers of the heathen that say, There is none other but we. Gather all the tribes of Jacob together, and inherit Thou them as from the beginning. O LORD, have mercy upon the people that is called by Thy name, and upon Israel whom Thou hast named Thy first-born. O be merciful unto Jerusalem, Thy holy city, the place of Thy rest. Fill Sion with Thine unspeakable oracles, and Thy people with Thy glory. Give testimony to those that Thou hast possessed from the beginning, and raise up prophets that may magnify Thine oracles. Reward them that wait for Thee, and let Thy prophets be found faithful. O LORD, hear the prayer of Thy servants, according to the blessing of Aaron over Thy people, that all they which dwell upon the earth may know that Thou art the LORD, the eternal GOD.'"*

A solemn Amen from all present concluded the fervent prayer of Gedaliah; and with many tears, and a mind relieved and lightened by the discharge

* Ecclus. xxxvi.

of an anxious but important duty, he departed with Berith to his own dwelling, committing the issue of his words and exhortations to Him who can turn the heart as rivers of water whithersoever He will.

NOTE.—In connecting Gedaliah's freedom from idolatry with his supposed custom of daily reading the Scriptures, the author's desire has been to put his character prominently forward as a practical illustration of the truth contained in the following extracts from three different authors.

"A strange propensity they had to idolatry; which is the more wonderful when we consider that this nation, which was so prone to idolatry, when they had so many prophets among them to admonish them against it, were not at all inclined to it when they had no more any prophets to instruct them, nor any miracles wrought among them; that is, after their return from the captivity of Babylon. * * * *

"The best account that I am able to give of this is, that before the captivity sufficient care was not taken for the building of synagogues for the teaching of the law, if there was any at all; for we find no mention of them in these books; whereas they abounded in every place after the captivity; insomuch, that the Jews say there were several hundreds in Jerusalem alone, wherein the law was read and taught; which was a most powerful means to keep them constant to the religion they professed."—BISHOP PATRICK'S *Commentary*. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15.

"If it be examined into, how it came to pass that the Jews were so prone to idolatry before the Babylonish captivity, and so strongly and cautiously, even to superstition, fixed against it after that captivity, the true reason hereof will appear to be, that they had the law and the prophets every week constantly read unto them after that captivity, which they had not before.

For before that captivity, they having no synagogues for public worship or public instruction, nor any places to resort to for either, unless the temple at Jerusalem, or the cities of the Levites, or to the prophets, when GOD was pleased to send such among them; for want hereof great ignorance grew among the people; GOD was little known among them, and His laws in a manner wholly forgotten. And, therefore, as occasion offered, they were easily drawn into all the superstitious and idolatrous usages of the neighbouring nations that lived round about them, till at length, for the punishment hereof, GOD gave them up to a dismal destruction in the Babylonish captivity."—DEAN PRIDEAUX'S *Connection*. Vol. I. p. 435.

"From the surprise and alarm which a discovery of the copy of the original law created in king Josiah and Hilkiah the high-priest, by reference to which they learned how widely they had deviated from the religion of their ancestors, we find that that complex system of sacred legislation had, for the space of one generation at least been preserved only in the form of general oral tradition. In this last-mentioned circumstance we cannot but remark the striking analogy which existed between the neglect of the written law of Moses, which prevailed in the latter period of the Jewish history previous to the captivity, and the disregard of the Holy Scriptures in general, which so strongly characterised that languid and worn-out state of the Church of Rome, which immediately preceded the establishment of Protestantism. It was not, as we are informed, until the second year after his entry into the monastery of Erfurt, that Luther accidentally met with a Latin Bible, and commenced that study of original revelation which shortly afterwards produced such important effects upon mankind; so like is human nature in all ages to itself."—SHUTTLEWORTH'S *Consistency of Reason and Revelation*. p. 164.

It may not be improper here to remark that as the Jews became latterly opposed to such evil customs, "*even to superstition*," as Dean Prideaux says above, so Christians too may like them, while avoiding the Romish errors of burying the Scriptures in darkness, run into the opposite extreme of

regarding Scripture, (each man or party for themselves,) as their sole guide, independently of Church authority, ministerial assistance, or any other of GOD's own appointed means and channels of instruction. "No man," says Dean Jackson, (Vol. VI. p. 165,) "not surprised with a Jewish slumber, but may clearly see how many amongst us place a great part of religion in being as extremely contrary to the Romish Church, as these later Jews were to the idolatry or superstition of the heathen or their forefathers. Now, if this zeal of contrariety to Romish superstition be but equal to the like zeal in the Jews, the hypocrisy, which is the resultance of such misguided zeal, must needs be more malignant; and easy it were if place and time did permit, to demonstrate how these men condemn themselves by judging the Romish doctrine and discipline in her grossest errors and practices: antarctics they are, and think they can never be far enough from the north pole, until they run from it unto the south pole, and pitch their habitation in a terra incognita, in a world and Church unknown to the ancients, and I fear unto themselves."

CHAPTER XIV.

" Of all external experiments, the most firm and solid, for assuring the truth of these divine oracles unto our souls, are gathered from the revolution of states or GOD'S judgments upon several lands and peoples. In the observation of which the continual story of the Jewish nation doth best direct us."
—JACKSON'S Works. Vol. I. Part 2. Sec. 3.

CHAPTER XIV.

"First, Moloch, horrid king, besmeared with blood
Of human sacrifice and parents' tears;
Though for the noise of drums and timbrels loud,
Their children's cries unheard, that passed through fire
To his grim idol. Him the Ammonite
Worshipped in Rabba and her watery plain,
In Argob and in Basan, to the stream
Of utmost Arnon. Nor content with such
Audacious neighbourhood, the wisest heart
Of Solomon he led by fraud to build
His temple right against the temple of God,
On that opprobrious hill; and made his grove
The pleasant valley of Hinnom, Tophet thence
And black Gehenna called, the type of hell."

Paradise Lost, Book I.

As the morning broke, and the light of day once more lifted the grey veil of mist with which nature like a maiden had screened herself during the hours of retirement—as Judah's hills and vales refreshed and yet glistening with the cooling dews of night, were again gradually unfolded to the view, how many an anxious eye was turned, as it had so often been before, towards the encampment and various outposts of the besieging host!

Might not the past night have at length brought the much wished for event? Might not the stroke of the destroying angel, so long withheld, have at last descended and have left only the dead bodies of their foes to mark his progress? Might not a panic from the LORD have caused them to fly hastily, as they did, in the days of Joram, from Samaria; and might not the sound of abundance be again ready to cheer the hearts of the famishing? or, lastly, might not the morning sun be already reflected on the advancing bucklers and spears of their Egyptian allies? But in vain was the earnest look directed to the hills of the south. No friendly hosts were seen advancing, or winding among the mountain passes, as the dreams of the night had fondly pictured, and as the voices of the false prophets had daily promised. No change was discernible in the tents or posts of the besiegers. To-day was to be as yesterday, or perhaps worse; and, with a heart sickening at the hope—once more deferred, the lips half unconsciously exclaimed, ere the sun had scarce risen upon the earth, "Would GOD it were night."

On many, indeed, the night of death had closed; and the mother, who had lain her down, trusting that rest might restore to herself and her famished infant that strength which long-continued hunger had impaired, awoke to find that she was clasping to her bosom only a lifeless corpse.* To others, as

* "On one side was lying dead the wife of a Portuguese soldier, with an infant at her breast, from which the little

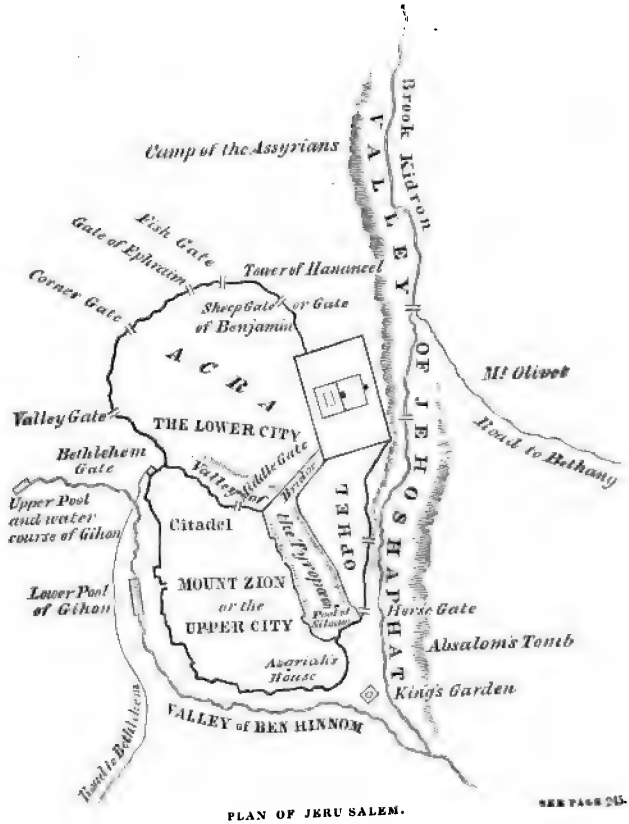
with the returning morn there necessarily returned also the renewed consciousness of yesterday's losses and bereavements, day seemed to be only a signal for commencing afresh those sorrows and lamentations which night had partially suspended. In the parent's bosom the aching void, which had been left by the bitter memory of the past, was far from being filled up or alleviated by the present prospects of the helpless survivors. Even where conscious guilt added no sting of remorse for having been the cause, immediate or remote, of such misfortunes to others, yet the trial was a hard one; but naturally tenfold more hard and severe where such ingredients were found mingled in the cup of reflection.

As Talmon stood that morning on the spacious level terrace which formed the roof of his house, commanding, by its elevated situation on the brow of mount Zion, a panoramic view of the holy city and its neighbourhood, various and contending feelings filled his heart. He cast his eyes rapidly around; the objects familiar to him from his infancy met his view; yet, in some way, he knew not how, they bore a different aspect in his eyes from what they had ever done before. A warning whisper was heard within, stifle it as he would, that a change, a mighty change was about to pass over all he now beheld. Though transient thoughts on

orphan vainly tried to extract its accustomed nourishment."—Life of a Soldier. Vol. II. p. 57. See Stretton's Classic Parallels.

the subject had occurred to him before, yet he had always succeeded hitherto in quickly banishing them from his mind. They had glanced off as a random shaft from the burnished corslet of steel, leaving scarcely a trace of its contact with the hard and polished surface. But now the first arrow of conviction seemed to have buried itself in his breast; and he gazed again, as at sunset the eye gazes intently on the glories of the western sky, knowing that they must so soon fade and be succeeded by the shades of night.

From the elevated and commanding point on which he stood the entire city was to be seen, seated on her mountain throne, before him. On his right and left, without the walls, gigantic hills bounded the view, standing like watchful guardians on either side to protect their royal mistress. Directly before him, towards the north, the distant ridges of Ephraim were indistinctly visible, softened and blended in the haze of morning, while nearer, the hill country of Benjamin boldly reared its numerous summits, severally catching on their eastern faces the warm tint of the sun's earliest rays. Gradually and gently sloping upwards from among these hills rose the comparatively level, but yet broken promontory, on the southern extremity of which stood the holy city. Shaped and moulded, as if for the very purpose, by the hand of nature, its appearance was at once imposing and majestic, as well as characteristic and singular. On the eastern and western sides it was bounded by deep valleys, which grew more and more steep and preci-



PLAN OF JERUSALEM.

SEE PAGE 245.

pitous as they continued their course southwards. These become united at length by one broad and deep ravine, which runs almost directly across from east to west, having the bold, bluff headland of mount Zion towering over it from a dizzy height above.

Nestled thus among her native hills, Jerusalem might have been compared to an eagle looking down from her eyry with scorn upon any who dared approach her with hostile intentions. And had the true Rock of her strength been with her she might, doubtless, have done so. But now, those very hills and valleys, the fortifications which nature had given her, seemed to conspire together, and cry out against her in a language too easily intelligible to the guilty conscience. Did Talmon turn his eyes towards the east, he beheld as of old that well-known mount, with its triple summit, gently sloping down beneath its shady olive groves towards the bed of the brook Kedron. But he saw also placed as though in full view of the temple of JEHOVAH, if not in rivalry of it, the shrines dedicated to Milcom and to Chemosh, the abominations of Ammon and of Moab. For generations they had remained, in bold effrontery, facing the holy mountain of Moriah, and, together with it forming as it were a second Ebal and Gerizim to the Jewish nation—as though man in his blindness and wilfulness had determined not to suffer GOD to establish the blessing without the accompanying curse.

Reared by the hand of the same royal architect,

to whom, even in preference to the son of Jesse, the honour had been granted of building a house for JEHOVAH the LORD of hosts, those idolatrous temples had stood, from the time of Solomon to that of Josiah, a monument of Judah's infidelity, even earlier than the idols of Israel in Dan and Bethel. Judah, though the younger of those two "lewd sisters"* in age, had been the elder in transgression. And though Josiah, in his pious zeal, had dismantled them, yet their ruins still told a tale of long-cherished national sin—of sin so far from being repented of that the demolition of those buildings on the spot where they first stood seemed to have been only a signal for transferring them to places more holy still, by their more immediate neighbourhood to the Temple of JEHOVAH. To the eye of the imagination indeed it might almost have appeared as if those impious shrines had been themselves demolished only in order that their countless fragments might, by some enchanter's art, become each a fresh and distinct object of forbidden worship in the streets and dwellings of the idolatrous city.

At that very moment the beams of the rising sun were intercepted from Talmon's view by one of those forbidden structures erected but lately on his own housetop. It was a bitter stroke of conscience which shot through his bosom as the recollection of Gedaliah's words of the preceding evening flashed just then across his memory. He turned hastily

* Ezekiel xxiii. 4.

away from that which had suggested the painful idea, and his eye now rested on the valley of the son of Hinnom. It lay almost at his feet as he looked towards the mountains which bounded Jerusalem on the south. On the steep sides of the valley a few straggling goats were browsing in the quiet and undisturbed enjoyment of the gifts of nature and of liberty—those very gifts so highly valued by man, and yet of which he so often madly robs himself. In the midst of creation's bounties, he, the lord of all, is too frequently by his own fault unable to avail himself of them, while others, his inferiors, even the beasts intended for his service, seem in his stead enjoying undisputed possession of them. They have no sting of remorse within to embitter their Maker's richest blessings, no pride or blind ambition respecting themselves, no gnawing sense of guilt for wilful misery caused to others. On the contrary, how does their unconscious yet contented and peaceful state, coupled as it is with comparative freedom from the vicissitudes which befall their superior but fellow creature man, seem sometimes to make them the objects even of envy to us;—how does it reproach us, like the innocent mirth of young children, who continue their sports in the very hour of domestic calamity, insensible of the sorrows which are weighing down the hearts of their nearest friends,* and seeming

* "But thou wert then, my son, a playful child,
Wondering at grief, gay, innocent, and wild,
Listening at times to thy poor mother's sighs
With curious looks and innocent surprise."

CRABBE'S *Jesse and Colin.*

to remind us that their instinctive reliance upon the protection of a kind Providence, helpless as they may appear to be, does more for them than all our boasted resources of reason and calculation, and human wisdom, can do for us.*

Unaided by a higher arm, little indeed, we must acknowledge, is all which frail man can effect for his own safety and well-being. But in Judah's case there was One whose care for His people "neither slumbered nor slept"—who, had they but permitted Him, would have stood round about them even as those guardian hills stood round about Jerusalem. Of this Talmon was well aware; and such a thought would once have been but too welcome to his heart; but it was so no longer. As he watched for a moment the straggling herd in the distance, bounding from crag to crag, he sighed deeply, and felt involuntarily the painful contrast between their unrestricted happy state and that of

* "I met a fairy child, whose golden hair
Around her sunny face in clusters hung;
And as she wove her king-cup chain she sung
Her household melodies—those strains that bear
The hearer back to Eden. Surely ne'er
A brighter vision blest my dreams. 'Whose child
Art thou,' I said, 'sweet girl?' In accent mild
She answered, '*Mother's.*' When I questioned 'Where
Her dwelling was,' again she answered '*Home.*'
'*Mother!*' and '*Home!*' O, blessed ignorance!
Or rather, blessed knowledge! What advance
Further than this shall all the years to come,
With all their love effect? There are but given
Two names of higher note—*Father* and *Heaven.*"
Church Poetry.

those who had once been their masters. Freedom was now in Judah only an empty name. The sad alternative left to himself and his fellow citizens was but death by the sword or bondage to the foe.

But again his eye was arrested by a familiar object, which summoned up many an association of past days. The road which led to his possessions at Beth-haccerem wound along the slope and over the summit of those hills on which he was gazing, and in thought he quickly travelled once more along each turn and bend of that well-known track. A few moments more, and he was in imagination wandering again among his terraced vineyards in the mountains of Tekoa. But, anon, the pallid, grief-worn features of a certain widowed face, which had met his view on the preceding day at the gate of Benjamin, presented themselves to his mind's eye, and he shrunk instinctively, as it were, from further thought.

There are times when, perhaps, for some wise but mysterious purpose conscience seems to be endued with double life, and sternly to assert for a while, at least in the way of reproach and admonition, her rightful dominion over the other faculties of the mind. It may possibly be her last convulsive effort—the final though involuntary act of that self-judgment here, which, if but rightly exercised, is mercifully intended to prepare us for passing safely through that judgment hereafter. If it be true, as it has been asserted, that GOD seldom sends actual and heavy calamities without specimens of them beforehand, to warn us

of, and to avert if possible, the final stroke, so too it may happen with the reproaches of a guilty conscience. The keen remorse which is sooner or later destined to follow upon hardened transgression comes not without having given us such foretastes of its bitterness as may induce us to make an earnest effort to save ourselves from the necessity of draining the fatal cup to the dregs.

Each successive object on which Talmon gazed that morning seemed to be but a fresh weapon in the hand of his inward monitor wherewith to crush every cheering idea as quickly as thought could give it birth. His eye now suddenly glanced downwards from that mountain path, and rested on the valley beneath—the valley of Ben-Hinnom. Uniting itself at the south-eastern angle of the city with that of Jehoshaphat, they form together a spacious hollow or basin, well watered by fountains as well as by the brook Kedron. The Kedron winds through it after having passed by the eastern foot of mount Moriah, and thenceforward following the course of the united valleys in a south-easternly direction empties itself into the Dead Sea or lake of Sodom. Irresistibly as the deep but noiseless current carries down whatever is left floating on its surface, sweeping alike around projecting headlands and retiring bays, so by some unseen influence Talmon found himself, even against his will, rapidly following in thought the onward course of Kedron's brook, winding, as it advanced, among hills, whose overlapping slopes quickly hid its channel from his sight. In vain did he endeavour to arrest his at-

tention and fix it on some of the familiar objects which lay nearer to him in the same direction. The royal gardens, once conspicuous for their beauty and extent, the pool of Siloam, the pillar of Absalom, were but momentary objects of regard as they successively met his eye. They were alike unable, much as he himself desired it, to divert by any associations which they could suggest the present headstrong current of his mind. Fain would he have lingered in reflection on the days when the royal hand that wielded the yet undivided sceptre of Judah and of Israel planned and planted those fair arbours and parterres. Gladly would he in imagination have indulged the fond hope of such days again returning to the daughter of Judah. But not even such imaginary consolation was he allowed at that hour to enjoy. Together with every such picture of the past that he attempted to draw were mingled visions of other cities, too, which had once basked in the sunshine of prosperity, whose "land had been well watered every where, even as the garden of the LORD," but in whose daughters, together with fulness of bread, there was found pride and abundance of idleness, neither did they strengthen the hand of the poor and needy."* A few miles only from the spot on which he stood, Kedron's pure stream was lost in the bitter and sulphureous waters which covered the ruins of those once flourishing "cities of the plain."

"Surely," said a voice within, "surely there is

* Ezekiel xvi. 49.

a GOD that judgeth the earth"—a voice, which though still and small, could not be hushed, but which seemed to ask next what meant those many mounds and hillocks scattered up and down before him in the deep valley of the son of Hinnom. Time was when a single heap of unhewn stones kindled in a moment the flames of honest indignation in Israel against the two tribes of their brethren that had thus dared to offend.* Nor was the fire of holy jealousy extinguished until every unhallowed purpose had been resolutely disavowed; and that, too, in the presence of the assembled hosts, whose uplifted hands were ready in behalf of GOD'S honour, to imbrue themselves in kindred blood.

But these were days "when Ephraim spake trembling, and exalted himself in Israel;" when trials and struggles were still the portion of the sons of Jacob; nor had they yet had leisure, through abundance of bread and through idleness to corrupt themselves—when, moreover, the remembrance of the waste howling wilderness, the land of great drought, was still fresh and recent in their minds. Since those days they had inherited goodly cities erected by others' labour, wells digged which they digged not, vineyards and olive trees which they planted not. And so those former days and the warning accompanying them, "When these things come to pass see that thou forsake not the LORD thy GOD," had been alike forgotten. That which the banks of Jordan, by the

* Joshua xxii. 16.

altar of testimony and by the assembled and devoted hosts under their leader Joshua, had disowned and protested against, it was destined for the valley of Tophet, sheltered as it was beneath the very wing and shadow of the sanctuary, to harbour and cherish in its bosom. Many an altar-mound shamelessly reared its idolatrous head to Moloch's honour in that hallowed spot; and the voices of the children, whose expiring shrieks rose above the crackling flames and the discordant shouts of those demon orgies, had ere now come up into the ears of him whose eyes were at that moment held riveted to the well-known scenes of such inhuman enormities.

It was a dark hour for Talmon. Every object around seemed to combine against his peace. In characters too legible to be mistaken "bitter things were written" against him. The crimes of his nation Talmon, though personally innocent of many of them, yet as a member of that nation, and especially as a prince and a counsellor, dared not disavow. Nay, more, he could not disguise from himself the manner in which he had lately used that power and influence which as a prince he possessed. The same voice within, as before, seemed to inquire, had he employed it to discountenance that open idolatry and those impious rites which the valley now before him had so often witnessed? Had he, Phinehas-like, raised hand or voice against the crimes for which the plague was even already gone forth among his people? Had he, like the prophet Urijah, braved the threats of powerful and

malicious enemies, and resisted even unto blood? Had he been really "valiant for the truth" in any way? Alas! no, answered that inward monitor, who still held him in unwilling conversation and communion within himself. Even if he had forborne in earlier years to partake in such profanations against the faith of his fathers, yet not only had he gone backwards in this respect of late, but there were also other evil practices against man, if not towards GOD, of which he could not but feel consciously guilty, and which as betokening something hollow and unsound within were sufficient to account first for supineness and then for actual transgression in other points.

Talmon's spirit sunk within him. Never before had these things appeared to him in so clear and collected a view. But during the past night they had haunted his rest, and the bright beams of morning had rather strengthened than dispelled their influence upon his mind. Life itself seemed to have become a burthen too heavy to bear; and but for those who could still claim from him the protection due from a husband and a father, he could at that moment have wished that he had been laid in peace in the same quiet resting place to which he had seen his youthful son prematurely consigned on the preceding day.

A deep-drawn sigh, by which his bosom seemed struggling to disburthen itself of some portion of its heavy load, was suddenly checked by Talmon's feeling a hand laid familiarly on his shoulder, accompanied by the salutation of a voice too well

known to be for a moment mistaken. "Why tarries the champion of the princes' cause alone on his housetop," asked Shephatiah, "while his troop are at their post waiting their leader's command? The captain of the Bethlehem gate was not wont to be the hindermost in the field or on the fortress. And why this gloomy, clouded brow, Talmon? Have any fresh or threatening tidings from our foes reached the ears of the princes?"

After a moment's pause Talmon replied, "Dost thou ask, Shephatiah, why my countenance is sad? Yesterday, at this hour, had I not a son in youth and health? That son the arrows of the Babylonians have robbed me of. Need a father's ears have bitterer tidings than these?" "The heathen tyrants—the blood-thirsty strangers!" said Shephatiah, himself as glad to find so ready a topic on which at once to enter, as Talmon was to disguise from a companion in guilt the risings of remorse that had been struggling within him for a hearing.

"Then, by the altar of Malcham, let a father's arm be bared in vengeance upon the oppressors of his country and the murderers of his child!" "The arm," said Talmon, "that has been so often raised against them shall not be drawn back in the day of battle. Would that its might were tenfold what it is! for fully, we fear, Shephatiah, will our cause require all the efforts which we can make for its support." "And if it be so," replied Shephatiah, "will Talmon be the person to bring an evil report upon it by breathing such ill-omened words as 'fear'—he who but a few hours since charged

the traitor prophet openly with his dastard cowardly designs?"

"The tongue that charges Talmon with fear," replied he, "shall need a ready hand to prove its words. I fear not for myself, Shephatiah. Death shall find me in the foremost of the battle; and were it not for others' sake, I had fain it had found me there this day. But a husband and a father has more than himself to care for. Yesterday I feared not for the safety of one in whose behalf fears are now superfluous. But a worse fate than that of death by the weapon of a foe may await the widowed mother and the unprotected maiden. Would GOD my life might ensure or purchase their safety! Pardon the yearnings and emotions of a parent's heart, Shephatiah. May happier times yet prove in your own case the strength of such feelings, not by bitterness, even in anticipation, such as mine, but by experience of their richest joys. Never have my lips before, or to any other ear, breathed so much as now to yours. And henceforth be there a seal upon them. They shall utter no more such words. But charge me not with fear."—"Let my right hand," replied Shephatiah, "forget her cunning, and my right arm its might in the day of battle, if I ever doubted that Talmon was among the foremost in valour of all the princes of Judah. But how shall we not be the more careful lest we lose such a one from our counsels or from our ranks? Should we not have wrought falsehood against our own cause, if we had not sent, as I have now been sent by Seraiah and our

noble confederates to inquire why so brave a leader of our hosts is absent from our company? While there is treachery abroad must not the friends of our holy city be watchful for its safety? Does Talmon assuredly know that the decree of the king is again reversed, and the designs of the princes defeated touching the prophet, the son of Hilkiah? Let the life of the Ethiopian stranger answer for it, if it be found that his advice has been as forward in persuading the king as his hand has been in delivering the traitor from the dungeon. But we will not thus be disheartened, Talmon. We will yet drive the proud Babylonian from beneath our walls. In spite of our foes at home and abroad, our country shall yet again flourish like a cedar of Libanus; and the prophet's burdens and visions of sorrow shall vanish like the mist which is now rolling away before the sun from yonder mountain sides.

"Look around, Talmon; mark well our city's lofty bulwarks; tell her towers. Why gaze so sadly and so steadfastly on the valley of the son of Hinnom? Look upwards and behold the fortress of the city of David, towering above the steep sides of Zion, and bearing, as a queen bears her diadem, the lion of Judah on the standard that floats proudly over her battlements. Shall that honoured banner be defiled or torn by heathen hands, Talmon? Believe it not. Bel shall first be bowed to the earth, and his servants shall either fall by our swords, or like the Assyrian in former times, they shall perish together in a moment by the blast of the destroying angel.

"And yonder holy temple, Talmon, that has stood since the days of Solomon, shall this, the very seat of JEHOVAH, the pride of all the earth, be given as stubble to the flames? Would that the men of Anathoth had accomplished their design* upon that deceiver who dares cast such blasphemous forebodings in our teeth. Have not our prophets foretold the speedy return even of those holy vessels of the temple which our enemies hold in their possession—but which they have never yet dared so much as to use for profane and unholy purposes? Well for them, verily, if those vessels prove not to their nation what the ark proved to Dagon and the Philistines, the source of deadly plagues and calamities. Let seers rave then, Talmon, and adversaries rage against us. They have oftentimes done so heretofore; but the temple of the LORD is still our own; and who is he that shall prevail against it?"

Talmon had turned towards the temple during the latter part of Shephatiah's address; and the sight of it, together with Shephatiah's deceitful but plausible arguments had begun to rekindle the spark of hope within him. To the eye cheering and impressive indeed was the view which presented itself from the elevated point where Talmon stood. At a little distance from mount Zion, towards the north-east, lay ranged, in fair and beauteous order, on the commanding but level summit of mount Moriah, the vast pile of buildings, which with its

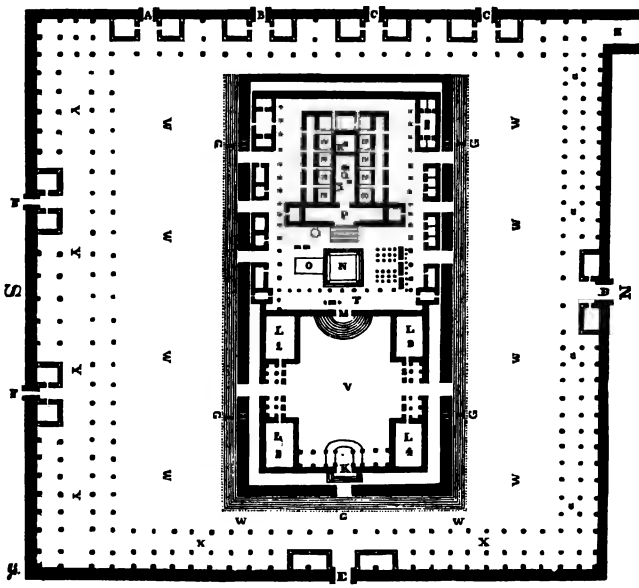
* See Jeremiah xi. 21.

GROUND PLAN OF THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM.

A Gate of Shallecheth.
B Gate Parbor.
CC Gates Asuppin.
D Gate of Tedi.
E Gate of Shushan.
FF Gates of Huldah.
G High Rails.
H Chel or Terrace.
I Flight of Steps.
K Beautiful Gate.
L Small Courts within Court of Women.

1 Court of Wine and Oil.
2 Court of Lepers.
3 Wood Court.
4 Court of Nazarites.
M Gate of Nicanor.
N Brazen Altar.
O Ascent to Altar.
P Porch.
Q Holy Place.
R Holy of Holies.
S Chambers on the side of the Temple.

T Court of Israel.
V Court of Women.
W Court of the Gentiles.
X Solomon's Porch or Cloister.
Y Triple Cloister, called the King's Cloister.
Z Descent to the Antonia.
a Cloister.



SEE PAGE 259.

spacious courts, its shady colonnades, and noble gateways, composed the far-famed temple of JEHOVAH. Standing distinct from the rest, even of the holy city, though itself still an integral portion of the isolated promontory on which Jerusalem was built, Mount Moriah rose with graceful and stately grandeur. Its very position and appearance seemed to stamp it at once with the dignity of a colossal altar-mound, reared by the hand of nature for the united and simultaneous devotions of an assembled nation. On its western side, a valley or deep depression in the ground separated it from Acra, the northern portion of the city, which valley was joined just at the southern side of Moriah by the Tyropæon valley, dividing mount Zion from Acra. On the lofty flights of steps which wound up the western side of the mount, and formed an approach to the temple from the quarter of Acra, many figures were seen ascending and descending on their several errands. What those errands were, whether of early worship within those sacred precincts, or of a less peaceful kind, the frequent gleaming of the buckler and spear among the passengers, seemed at least to make it a matter of doubt. At this point, where the two hills of Zion and Moriah approached nearest each other, a noble arch boldly spanned the valley beneath, connecting the palace of the king with the temple. Across the bridge supported by this arch were passing and repassing various parties of armed men, among whom Talmon easily recognised some of the princes, his associates. All seemed

stirring with life. Multitudes could be seen thronging the temple courts, and the porticos which surrounded them; and in the apparent cheerfulness of the scene, as viewed from a distance, Talmon felt himself almost beginning to forget the gloomy thoughts which the events and reflections of the few preceding hours had brought with them. There, in its pride, was still the sacred fabric which the two greatest of Israel's monarchs, the warrior father and the gifted sage, his son, had contributed to rear; and which they had beautified with all the resources of wealth and artistic skill, which not only themselves and their subjects but also neighbouring nations could supply. It was in itself an emblem and pattern, as from its heaven-directed plan might have been expected, of what the nation which possessed it, ought herself to have been among the nations at large. Nearer than its outer courts no stranger was allowed, by the divine command, to approach towards the holy place. The chosen nation alone was allowed to draw closer to the presence of the Deity who dwelt there. He Himself had appointed that barrier against all besides. The centre, accordingly, of the whole summit of Moriah formed an inner but still spacious inclosure, surrounded like the outer one with porticos and colonnades over which were the various chambers of the priests, the store rooms for the incense and other offerings of various kinds. The numerous arched gateways, or entrances, with their public council-rooms above them, the porch of Solomon conspicuous among

them all, the great chamber of the Sanhedrim, or supreme court of justice, situated nearly in the centre of the area, all these, familiar to him from his childhood, were associated in Talmon's mind, not only with many personal recollections, but with the most treasured events of former days and of national honour.

In the western half or division of that inner court stood the altar of JEHOVAH around which the natural or adopted members of the chosen nation, and they only, might assemble to serve Him. Still further towards the west and on a level somewhat raised above the other courts appeared the tabernacle or true temple, the immediate presence chamber of the mighty GOD of Israel. Within and without all was most costly—yet all in fair and beauteous proportions—harmoniously arranged and planned according to the design of Him in whose honour it had been reared.

"Will our GOD indeed, Talmon, give so noble a structure up to the destroyers?" asked Shephatiah, who had been purposely silent for a time. Will He betray to heathen foes the house which He himself hath caused to be built to His honour?" "GOD forbid," replied Talmon—"GOD forbid," re-echoed Shephatiah. "The prophet is false. Let his curses and blasphemies return on his own head. But it is now no time for us to tarry here, while the enemy is at our gates. In the name then of his own gods, let us haste and defy him."

With these words, and while the favourable moment was his own, Shephatiah succeeded in

hurrying his victim away, and Talmon, casting one more look towards the temple, followed Shephatiah's steps down the stone stairs which led directly outside the house from the housetop to the court below. He felt for the moment cheered and reassured; but could he have seen the truth, he would have known that he had only been once more lured and deceived partly by the plausible arguments of a companion more hardened in guilt than himself, partly by the working of his own sinful heart. Early associations and pious instructors had taught him most properly a reverence for GOD'S temple; but he forgot that he was the servant of a GOD, who will have "mercy and not sacrifice," with whom "to obey is better than all whole burnt offerings," and consequently before whom reverence for what is external, while the heart is not whole within, is lighter than vanity. The fairest mortal frame when forsaken by the spirit that animated it, will soon turn to corruption; and so it is with all outward forms and rites of religion. Had Talmon been but alive to such simple truths, he would not have placed so much assurance on mere external reverence for the sanctuary of JEHOVAH. A more intimate knowledge of his own heart indeed might have led him to doubt whether his feelings deserved even so good a name as this; whether they would not more properly have been identified with mere national pride. The early associations and impressions which had been imparted to him, if they had been preserved pure, would not have allowed him lightly to overlook,

as he had just done, two objects that had necessarily met his eye in gazing upon the temple of JEHOVAH. It was the time of the morning sacrifice; but no wreathing volumes of smoke were seen ascending towards heaven from the altar of the LORD. The daily offering had ceased; and the stores of oil and wine from which the drink offerings were wont to be furnished, had been, as he knew, rifled to supply the revels of the military brothel.

He might next have observed groups of worshippers, even in those holy courts, with their backs turned towards the tabernacle and the mercy seat between the cherubims, their faces directed towards the rising sun, and their figures prostrated in forbidden adoration before the host of heaven. But alas! even these things had become familiar to his sight; yet his deceitful heart persuaded him that he still reverenced the temple of the LORD.

CHAPTER XV.

"When petty things crowd about the growth of every day's business; when here in our own little world, its objects and its interests fill our minds just as much as if they were the objects and interests of a nation; when it is all, if I may so speak, one great plain, so thickly set with objects, that small as they are in themselves, their very nearness and number shut out all view of the far-off mountains; how shall we keep within our hearts the music of our 'Hosannas to the Son of David,' when our tongues cannot be uttering them aloud?"—ARNOLD's *Sermons*, IX. Vol. III.

CHAPTER XV.

"O thou defiled Jerusalem,
That drinkest thine own blood as from a fountain,
Thou hast piled up the fabric of thy guilt
To such portentous height that earth is darkened
With its huge shadow—that dost boast the monuments
Of murdered prophets, and dost make the robes
Of GOD'S high priest a title and a claim
To bloodiest slaughter—thou that every day
Dost trample down the thunder-given law,
Even with the pride and joy of him that treads
The purple vintage."

MILMAN'S *Fall of Jerusalem.*

THE narrow world of his own experience in which each man is by the circumstances of our common condition in some degree compelled to live, forms but one among many proofs of the immeasurable distance between our limited faculties, and those of Him who from His throne above beholdeth all the dwellers upon earth—unto whom all hearts be open and from whom no secrets are hid. Overwhelmed as the heart of man often is by its own bitterness, or engrossed and elated with its own transient and selfish joys, it has but little room for thoughts respecting the weal or woe of those who

though beyond the little circle of its own immediate kindred, yet are members of the great family of mankind, descended from the same common parents, and, if belonging to the "household of faith," "brethren and co-heirs of the promises." So many and so various are the cares and troubles, even the necessary business and employments which have ever claimed our attention since it has been ordained for man "by the sweat of his brow to eat his bread," in other words, so fully "sufficient for each day is the evil thereof," that we are for much of our time confined, as it were, prisoners within a world of self. Doubtless it was not originally meant to be so. Before the sad change, which has passed over man's estate, took place, things were different; and it is consequently to be viewed as part of our present trial—as one effect of those thorns and briers which this life was thenceforth, like the earth on which we tread, to bring forth unto us, that we have now constantly to contend against so ungenerous and unamiable a principle within us. For in spite of the evil tendency of our nature, we are still bidden to "weep with those that weep," and "to rejoice with those that rejoice"—to have in ourselves "that mind which was in Him, who from the earliest days "in all His people's affliction was Himself also afflicted."

If we once allow the counter-current of selfishness to prevail against us, we know not what hidden dangers may await us. The spirit of oppression, that hydra-headed monster, steals silently upon its unconscious victims. Quickly at its appearance

all feelings of love and mutual regard are found to vanish. The means of ministering to others, good and comfort are turned into materials for increased self-aggrandisement, or self-indulgence. Hatred usurps the place of friendship—and in spite of the world's plausible and specious pretensions it too often happens that every man's hand is in reality turned against his brother.

Widely had this evil spirit spread itself throughout the social frame of the devoted daughter of Judah. As Talmon, roused once more from despondency, and elated for the time by the sophistry of a deceitful heart, left his home that morning in company with Shephatiah, he allowed himself to forget in the prospect of his own success, what aggravated sufferings each day was heaping on his humbler fellow-countrymen. Provided that he and his associate princes could but carry out their plans, they wasted not a thought on the misery which their obstinate counsels had already entailed and were still entailing on others. The most heart-rending scenes no longer produced any effect upon minds thus steeled against compassion. The morning which had now opened upon them, was about to put their feelings once more to the test. On leaving Talmon's house they proceeded forthwith towards the northern quarter of the city. For there it was at one of the chief gates, that Shephatiah had his command. It was there too, as being one of the most available points, that the enemies had made the most persevering and successful attempts against the city walls. A breach had

been effected, but by building up constantly a fresh wall within, as the outer one was destroyed, the besieged had been hitherto able to prevent the entrance of the assailants. Frequent skirmishes however by night as well as by day took place, and the besiegers were continually gaining some fresh advantage, though not without occasional losses on their own side.

On the night which had just passed, an attack, made by the Babylonians, had been repelled with the slaughter of several of their troops, and their dead bodies had been left lying till morning outside the gate together with those of the citizens who had fallen. As Talmon and Shephatiah approached the gate, a party of the guard were just bringing in upon a rude open wain or cart the mangled corpses of the slain. Heaped together as they had been hastily thrown on to the cart, they lay some buried beneath the weight of the human mass above them, others apparently ready to slide off and fall beneath the wheels as the cart moved onward. Their armour and accoutrements had been already stripped from off them, by the hands of early spoilers, who were eager to seize such trophies of success against the hostile Babylonians. Their limbs, stained in many parts with the matted blood, that had oozed from their wounds, and now stiffened with the cold of night, vibrated abruptly from side to side with the heavy jolt of the carriage, like the unwieldy boughs of some forest tree which wave sullenly beneath the gusts of the winter storm. And as occasionally in passing over a more rugged

and uneven portion of the ground, an arm, rigid and extended, as though just about to deal the hostile blow, and in this position projecting beyond the rest, was observed to sway to and fro more rapidly in a sort of mock-menacing attitude, loud bursts of triumphant laughter broke forth from the bystanders and spectators.

At each step, as they now advanced, fresh indignities were studiously offered to the unconscious victims of their malignity. Some with ridicule and revilings would try the points of their swords upon the naked and helpless carcasses of their foes.* Others would tear the head from the body, and fix the reeking trophy aloft on a spear near the gateway—in revenge, as they boasted, for the like cruelties practised on their own relatives and comrades.

That such had indeed been too often the savage treatment practised towards their prisoners and slaughtered foes on both sides, the scene of the morning in question was about to give a painfully convincing proof. For among the bodies as they were thrown rudely upon the ground in the open space about the gateway, one was observed, which in the confusion had been mixed with those of the Babylonians, but which by the dress and other marks was evidently that of a Hebrew. Scarcely a feature remained distinguishable; for in addition to the skull having been cloven through with a battle-axe, the countenance had been purposely disfigured and mutilated, and both hands had been

* See Josephus. Wars of the Jews, Book VI. Chap. 14.

severed from the arms. In this state, probably, of helplessness and mutilation, though still alive, it had been intended by the Babylonians that the wretched victim of their cruelty should have been left; but when the skirmish took place, the death-blow which terminated his sufferings had been given either by accident or intentionally, and he was found lying among the slain, side by side with his late merciless captors. Many a careless eye was cast for a moment on the remains of the unfortunate man as his body was first observed among those of his foes. Another moment and the subject had passed as an ordinary sight from their thoughts. From among the crowd, however, a female figure was seen anxiously advancing, and after a few moments passionately embracing with tears and cries the dead body of him whom she quickly recognised in spite of his wounds and disfigurements to be her husband. The design which he had in view when he left her on the preceding evening she well knew, and a moment's search convinced her that the token was not wanting. Closely wrapt in the bosom folds of his outer garment were found a few fresh but coarse herbs, such as grew wild beneath the city walls, and with them some of the yet unripe fruit of the prickly pear. In the general but distressing want of food, even such refuse herbage as this was greedily sought and valued; and in the hope of gaining some such scanty sustenance for his starving family Zophar had risked life and safety on the past night by venturing outside the city gates. If any other

proof were wanting to confirm the worst fears of the distracted widow, another moment supplied it. Steeped and besmeared in gory mud, the girdle which her own hands had made, was hastily loosened from his waist; and as each fold opened successively to her view, every shade of hope vanished from Zilpah's mind. It was her own, her beloved Zophar. While engaged in his dangerous attempt, he had been overtaken by a party of the enemy, and had thus fallen like many others before him, a victim to the cruel practices of a savage and brutal warfare.

Loud and heart-rending were Zilpah's cries as she threw herself, in the bitterness of her grief, upon the remains of him who but a few hours before had embraced her with all a husband's love —strengthened as even that was under the present circumstances by the constraining influence of distress, by mutual fear for each other's safety, and by united anxiety for their youthful family. Insensible to all that was passing round her, and absorbed in her own overwhelming sorrows, she lay for some minutes, in appearance almost as much lost to the outer world as he about whose neck her arms were tightly clasped. Various were the passers to and fro, some attracted by curiosity, having heard of the skirmish which had happened during the night, some connected in one way or other with the guard or with the quarters of the general who commanded at the gate. Little attention, however, was attracted by the now frequent spectacle of a widow's hopeless sorrows over the slain.

"Woman," at length said a harsh voice of one who had approached unperceived close to Zilpah's side, "unless thou wouldst fain lighten the burden of thy grief by witnessing a merrier sight than that of the dead who are already gone, it were well for thee to remove hence. For by the life of Malcham, ere the shadow shall have advanced one degree further on the dial, yonder gibbet-tree will again be decked with a traitor's carcass. Aha," after a moment's pause he added, "said I not the truth? Who is this that is being dragged hither even now in the forefront of the crowd, but the faithless miscreant, tricked out as we took him at midnight in his Babylonian gear? Methought it was not in vain that we burnt the sweet cane upon Baal's altars on the day in which the coward fled from our ranks. But I must begone. Woman, beware, lest the guard or the throng trample thee under foot as thou liest here among the dead."

Zilpah raised her head in fear and dismay at hearing such a warning. In a moment she caught sight of the multitude rapidly advancing towards her in one direction with their wretched victim guarded by a small detachment of the soldiery. In the other direction she observed a person descending alone by the stairs that led from the council-room over the gateway to the open square in front of it. His dress was not that of a person at all connected with military affairs. Instead of the helmet and breastplate which gleamed on the head and breast of almost every other person whose figure then met her eye, he wore the usual peace-

ful costume—flowing robes, reaching nearly to the ancle, with the girdle and ample headdress, both of the finest linen. Though evidently not in a military capacity, yet issuing, as Zilpah had seen him do, from the council-room, and being immediately, while she was looking on, joined by an attendant, she could not doubt but that he was a person of some rank and importance. "Should she at once venture to entreat his aid?" was the thought that shot like lightning through her mind. Not a moment was to be lost, if she hoped to effect her object, which was to get the body of her lamented Zophar removed ere the crowd, which was now rapidly advancing, should come up, and trample it to the ground. In another instant she was at the stranger's feet, entreating him, with all a widow's earnestness, to assist in accomplishing her sad task. He no sooner understood the nature of her request than he at once commanded his attendant, and by liberal offers of recompense procured the assistance of some of the bystanders to help in removing the body and depositing it in a retired spot apart from the open thoroughfare. In a few words he then inquired of his weeping but grateful suppliant whither she would next wish to have the corpse conveyed.

As she again fell upon it with renewed tears and sobs, exclaiming, "Zophar, oh! my Zophar," the stranger started, and asked of her whether it were her husband who lay dead before him, and if so what had been his name. "Zophar, my lord, was the name of thy servant," she replied, "Zophar the

son of Raphiel." A pang shot through the heart, and a look of earnest pity and sympathy, not unmingled with astonishment, passed over the swarthy features of him who made the inquiry, as he heard the reply. Without asking more questions, he hastily bade his attendant and the assistants whom his offers of gold had for the time engaged in his service, to do the widow's bidding, first desiring them quickly to bind up the gaping skull and to clear the face from the clotted blood with which it was besmeared, that he might have an opportunity, if possible, of recognising the features of the dead. This being done he bade them proceed carefully whither the woman should direct them, and he would follow. The crowd with the guard and their prisoner had now just passed by the spot where they were standing, towards the gateway; and as the stranger looked back for a moment, he caught sight of Talmon and Shephatiah still stationed at the window of the council-room in the tower, watching the proceedings of the multitude as they were assembled in the square below to witness the execution. At the same moment a shriek of mingled horror and surprise, as though the heart itself had burst in the effort, was uttered by the unfortunate woman in whose behalf the stranger had so kindly lent his aid. For an instant she had raised her eyes, as the throng passed by with the victim of their revengeful triumph in front of them. No sooner had she unexpectedly caught a view of his countenance than she fell flat upon the ground, exclaiming, "My son! my lost son! it is he!"

CHAPTER XVI.

"The times in which unbelief has prevailed are, as history teaches, uniformly times of earthly calamity; for the moral depravation which accompanies unbelief necessarily destroys the foundation of all earthly prosperity."—NEANDER'S *Church History*, p. 15.

CHAPTER XVI.

"When the ear heard me then it blessed me;
When the eye saw me it gave witness to me;
Because I delivered the poor that cried,
And the fatherless, and him that had none to help him."
Job xxix. 11.

At the foot of Acra, where many streets from its upper quarters terminated, and like tributary streams that fall into the channel of some noble river, united themselves with the main thoroughfare of the Tyropæon, multitudes of people were seen, some collected in groups, some hastening from one quarter to another, some stopping to inquire, while anxiety and earnestness were depicted in every feature, what tidings the return of morning had brought with it. Ghastly, hollow faces, parched lips, and eyes projecting unnaturally from their sunken sockets, spoke plainly the dire effects of the prevailing famine. Children raking among the offal of the sewers for whatever shreds or fragments of food might have escaped their previous day's search, were ever and anon quarrelling and con-

tending for the nauseous morsels which one might have anticipated the other in discovering. Others were busy searching every fold and hiding place in the garments of those whose dead bodies were lying strewn on the ground around them. Either they supposed that some food might be left secreted on their persons, or that they were purposely feigning death to escape being searched. Here and there small parties of maidens, whose graceful but emaciated figures and features seemed to tell of youthful beauty withered in the bud, were returning from Siloam carrying their empty pitchers on their shoulders.

"Haste thee, Mahlah, haste thee," said an aged matron to one of them, as she came near her. "The night and the fever have left thy sisters weakly and exhausted; and they are impatiently waiting to quench their burning thirst with the coolest water thou canst find for them. Tarry not, my daughter. GOD speed thy way and give thee comfort; I will return again at even."—"Nay, but good Naomi," replied Mahlah, "why leave us? I pray thee return with me," she added, while the tears streamed down her wan, pale face. Our pitchers are empty, for the fountain is dry; and we wot not where to go for water. But it may be that with the morning light my father has returned, and he will show us where to find water, that my sisters perish not for thirst. Before daybreak my mother went to seek for him; for her dreams troubled her, she said, and she bade me entreat thee to tarry with us till she came again."

"I may not tarry now, my daughter," said Naomi with sorrow. "Thy cousin's wounds must needs be dressed at morning, and he hath none but me to help him, and where I shall find food for him to-day I wot not. There is thy kinswoman also, the widowed Rizpah. Yesterday at even when I left her, her youngest child was at the point to die. She must be looked to. Verily this is a day of reproach and anguish to Judah—but be patient, my daughter, and may the LORD yet lift up His countenance upon us, and send us better times."

Mahlah with a heavy heart pursued her way homewards, through the narrow streets of the densely peopled quarter of Acra. Unconscious of the approach of any fresh trials or troubles she was almost sinking beneath the weight of those already pressing upon her. And little indeed was there in the aspect of all around to cheer her drooping spirits. The looks of even familiar friends and neighbours and much more those of strangers, as she passed them, were too full of their own miseries, to allow the faintest hope of sympathy for others' woe, or the most distant prospect of their possessing the means of relieving their fellow-sufferers. The moans of the dying, and the wailings of their disconsolate friends were the prevailing sounds in almost every house. The cheering and busy noise that was wont to be heard in past days at that early hour of the morning as the women grinding the corn for the day's consumption accompanied their task with the song of contented industry—

the kindly interchange of early inquiries and salutations which Mahlah had been in the habit of receiving from her equals and acquaintances, as they crossed each other's way to the herb or the wood market—the silvery tinkling of the camels' bells as with noiseless step the long drove left the caravansera and threaded the winding streets towards the city gates, after depositing their precious burthens of spices from the south—the glad voices of the children at play in the open squares or market places—all such happy sounds of public peace and plenty, or of domestic ease and contentment had long ceased to greet the ears of the once joyous city and her children. The maiden's hand no longer plied the rapid shuttle, nor watched the growing figures on her embroidered loom, beguiling the pleasing task with the voice of native melody—the matron's wheel and distaff stood motionless and idle—the cunning artificer had forsaken his workshop to keep watch on the ramparts; and if aught could still be heard of former industry and employment, it was only at the ponderous forge of the smith, whose labours in supplying fresh weapons and engines for the war seemed endless as the siege itself.

The sun was already fast hastening on along his upward course, and seemed again preparing in the full strength of a Syrian summer, to pour down from his throne as it were of molten brass, the same flood of scorching rays as he had shed for many weeks past on the parched hills and valleys of Judea, withering every herb, and completing the

disastrous effects of the early drought—his beams were just beginning to penetrate even the narrow and lofty streets of the city, purposely so built to secure shade and coolness, when Mahlah despondingly took down the empty pitcher from her shoulder, and, avoiding as much as possible the notice of the bystanders, passed under the low gateway of the building which contained all that was dear to her on earth. She quickly found herself again by the bedside of her two helpless sisters. Flushed with the crimson hue of fever, their looks were speedily directed towards her at the first sound of her steps; and with imploring gestures and faltering tongues they together entreated her to cool their lips with the fresh-drawn water which they had relied upon her procuring for them. Mahlah had not had time to answer their inquiries or to explain to them her disappointment, before steps were heard approaching their apartment, accompanied by unusual sounds, as though of one sobbing from deep grief or distress. Mahlah quickly recognised her mother's voice, even disguised as it was by the accents of overwhelming sorrow. In an instant she flew to meet her, and found her suspicions too fully realised. Her mother's garments rolled in blood and dust hung loosely and in disorder about her. Supported by two strangers, who were rather carrying than assisting her—so overpowered and helpless had she become—Mahlah met her just as they were crossing the small court of the house towards the room in which they dwelt. "Leave me, leave me, that I may die with him who

was my life and my stay. Let these arms be once more thrown around his neck," were the first words which Mahlah indistinctly caught from her mother's lips. "We are undone, we are undone, my daughter," was the wretched mother's address to Mahlah as she first gained sight of her. "Oh that these eyes had never seen the light of day. Would that the earth had opened her mouth and swallowed us up, ere this day of evil tidings had overtaken us."

Mahlah terrified and alarmed, but trusting that it might be only some false report such as had often before reached their ears, retreated to make way for her mother and those who were accompanying her. Immediately after them followed the stranger who had so suddenly and fortunately been raised up to become Zilpah's friend in the critical hour of distress. Observing as he did at once the two sick damsels on their low straw pallets in one corner of the room, and being fearful of the effects which two sudden a disclosure of the truth might have on them, he whispered in the most kind and soothing accents to the mother, that she should spare them the bitter trial of hearing at present the melancholy events of the morning. By urgent entreaties he prevailed on her to be for a short time silent or rather to confine her grief to inarticulate sobs and groans. This done, he inquired earnestly of Mahlah why she did not attend to the calls of the sick who were still imploringly begging for water? "Whither, my lord," replied Mahlah, "shall I go for water? Our cistern hath been long

dry;" and then pointing to her empty pitcher, she added, "My steps were the latest yesterday at even, and again the earliest this morning at the pool of Siloam; but the stream has ceased to flow, and we have returned empty-handed."

The stranger, aware as he was already of there being a scarcity of water, had been far from realising to his mind such urgent need of it as the scene now before him presented. In the houses of the wealthy there was still a small quantity remaining from the annual supply caught in the rainy season and conducted into the capacious subterranean reservoirs with which every house was furnished. But in the dwellings of the poor, the needy multitudes who had crowded into the city during the siege had quickly exhausted this resource, scanty indeed as it had been and far below the usual average. The stranger called to his servant, and bidding him set down the packet which he bore in his hand, directed him to take the empty pitcher, and having filled it, to return as quickly as possible.

In the mean time, untying the bundle which his attendant had left, he put into Mahlah's hands a small bag of unground corn, and desired her at once to grind or parch some of it for their present use. Mahlah, with surprise and gratitude, seized the welcome gift, and in her haste to supply the wants of those around her almost forgot for the moment the hints of fearful import which her mother's words had let fall.

To parch the corn, which would have been the

quickest method of preparing it, was impossible; for fuel had long since failed, and it was months since they had known the taste of any food dressed by fire. She was accordingly about to grind a small quantity, but in a moment was surrounded by some younger children, who had been roused by the sound of such unusual preparations. To repress or control their impatience was beyond Mahlah's utmost power; before she had time to prepare or knead it, they greedily seized the hard grains in their unground state, and began devouring them with avidity.

During the interval the stranger had a few minutes' leisure to look round him, and he soon perceived in the appearance of the room other symptoms of the long continued scarcity of water. Soiled and spotted garments, thrown, as if in disgust, into any corner or hiding place—the floor coated with the various substances collected by the children's feet, for the cleansing of which there no longer stood the accustomed vessel at the entrance of the dwelling—even the bed clothes and raiment discoloured and offensive—all these were marks of great wretchedness and privations—privations doubly painful in a climate where the heat rendered cleanliness indispensable even for health, and among a people whose habits were scrupulously nice on these points.

What next attracted the stranger's attention was a number of objects hanging loosely in different places around the walls of the chamber, and consisting apparently of elaborate designs of carved

wood-work. Some represented the trunks and overshadowing branches of clustering trees—some porticos and colonnades of pillars—some human figures, male as well as female; but conspicuous among them was a highly finished model of what could hardly be mistaken for an altar of sacrifice. The sight of these objects suddenly recalled to the stranger's mind some few particulars which he had accidentally become acquainted with respecting the unfortunate man whose widow and orphan family he now beheld around him.

Zophar had been by trade a carpenter, and had acquired considerable skill in one of its highest branches, that of carving. He had inherited and indeed learnt the trade from his grandfather Bezaleel, who in the reign of Manasseh had been one of the most able workmen of his time. The designs and models which hung around the walls were such as Zophar himself had conceived and executed for the new palace built by Jehoiakim, the brother of the present king. Zophar had employed all his own skill and art for some years in this work, and had been employed by the king's officers to superintend other decorations of the same kind in the royal mansion. The payment, however, of his wages had been deferred from time to time, till at length his own resources had become quite exhausted; but still he had laboured on, afraid of sacrificing what was already due to him if he forsook his present post, and yet having now no other means than money borrowed on usury by which to maintain himself or his family. The palace being

at length completed, less attention than before was paid to the workmen's demands for payment; and many a one like Zophar was thus iniquitously reduced to distress and poverty after spending for years their labour and their substance in providing for the luxurious comforts of their ungrateful sovereign.*

Thus much of Zophar's history the stranger had heard on a former occasion. A very few words of inquiry were sufficient to explain to him the rest. "Are these carvings which I see," he asked of Mahlah, "the work of thy father's hands?"

"All save one," replied she. The model of the great altar which King Ahaz set up, after the pattern of the one at Damascus, is the work of one of my forefathers." "These," she added, pointing to one side of the room, "are copies from the work which my father executed for the new palace of the king." And her voice faltered as she remembered how often her father in the hour of distress and poverty had been wont to lament for his children's sake rather than his own, over those memorials of his unrequited services. "And these again," she was going on to add, pointing to the other wall, "are—" but ere the words could pass her lips conscience suddenly smote and checked her. The stranger asked no more. His eye had been too well accustomed to the sights which daily met him in Jerusalem and her streets to fail of recognising, even in the unfinished state in which some

* See Jeremiah xxii. 13.

of them had been left, the various representations which Mahlah hesitated to describe. Images and idols borrowed from every neighbouring people were to be seen in the streets and dwellings of the once holy city; and Zophar had been compelled, as a last resource and against his conscience, to prostitute his hand to the forbidden trade of fabricating heathen shrines and figures for his idolatrous fellow countrymen. The stranger sighed inwardly, and yet wondered not that the LORD, the jealous GOD, should visit His people with the rod of His anger for these things.

His attendant had now returned, bringing a supply of water, which, short-lived as was the relief which it could afford, was hailed as an invaluable boon.

Having enjoyed the satisfaction of seeing the feverish lips of the two sick damsels cooled and refreshed by his seasonable benevolence, and now whispering a few more words of comfort into the disconsolate widow's ear, with promises of further relief and assistance, Ebedmelech (for the charitable stranger was no other than he) took his leave. He had learnt some brief particulars of Zophar's earlier history on the night preceding, when the unfortunate man had so unexpectedly accosted the king and himself in their evening walk. After the few words which had passed between them in the king's hearing, Ebedmelech had beckoned to Zophar to follow him, and in the course of their hasty return to the palace he had made himself acquainted with the outline of his present and former circumstances, as well

as with his name and place of abode. It was the recent recollection of this which had caused Ebedmelech to start with surprise on hearing the same name pronounced by the distressed widow on the following morning, and on witnessing the mangled remains of him with whom he had conversed only so short a time before.

Zophar, fearful of relying on Ebedmelech's promises of relief, which he had kindly assured him that he should receive on the next morning, had ventured still on his intended search outside the walls, and there, like many others before him, had met his end. But Ebedmelech, when despatched at the dawn of day by the king to learn what tidings the return of morning had brought, forgot not to put into his servant's hands the seasonable gift which he had just bestowed, though under circumstances very different from what he had anticipated, upon the distressed family of Zophar.

CHAPTER XVII.

"The LORD had made a covenant with them, and charged them, saying, Ye shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them. * * * * Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner. So these nations *feared the* LORD *and served their graven images*, both their children and their children's children."—2 Kings xviii. 35, 40, 41.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Thammuz came next behind,
Whose annual wound to Lebanon allured
The Syrian damsels to lament his fate
In amorous ditties all a summer's day;
While smooth Adonis from his native rock
Ran purple to the sea, supposed with blood
Of Thammuz yearly wounded. The love tale
Infected Sion's daughters with like heat;
Whose wanton passions in the sacred porch
Ezekiel saw, when by the vision led
His eye surveyed the dark idolatries
Of alienated Judah."

Paradise Lost, Book I.

OVER the lofty gateway which led from the women's court to the court of Israel was a spacious chamber commanding the view of the whole Temple area. It was there that the Sanhedrim or great council of the princes was in those days wont to hold its assemblies.* The position of the tower and gateway was central and conspicuous, and was intended probably to be so as corresponding with

* See Lightfoot, Ed. fol. Lond. 1684, Vol. I. p. 1063.

the dignity and importance which the tribunal itself held in the body politic of the Hebrew state. Looking eastward from this point, the eye rested first upon the nearer or women's court, surrounded by its various chambers and colonnades, and next upon part of the outer court or court of the Gentiles with its still more extensive porticos and more numerous gateways. In the same direction, but more distant, the Mount of Olives, with its fruitful groves and tufted palms, separated only from Mount Moriah by the deep valley of the Kedron, formed the back ground of the view. In the opposite direction, westward, the lofty hill of Gihon bounded the prospect. Between it and the Temple lay the city, rising almost like an amphitheatre from the foot of Mount Moriah, having Acra or the lower city to the right, Mount Zion or the upper city to the left. But nearer still, and exactly facing the gateway, stood, on its own distinct and elevated level, the holy sanctuary of the LORD of Hosts, with its towering porch and its two famous brazen pillars. On a lower level, and at the foot, as it were, of this temple throne, was seen the great brazen altar of burnt offerings, its capacious base and gentle ascent occupying the centre of the priests' court, which was itself surrounded by the greater court or court of Israel.

In the council-room of the Sanhedrim, for generations past, the senators of Judah had been wont to hold their deliberations on sacred matters. As the high-priest was, by virtue of his office, president of this assembly, he naturally became possessed

of much influence in directing its proceedings. Such influence Seraiah, it may be easily imagined, had at the present time not failed to use to the utmost. At every crisis of affairs here was a rallying point for any who would unite in his plans, and allow themselves to be made his agents or confederates. Here was also a ready hearing given to any designs or suggestions against those who presumed to thwart the high-priest or his associates.

Early on the morning of that day Seraiah was seen passing with hurried steps from the council-room, through the temple courts, in the direction of the city; and those who happened to notice the knitted brow and angry scowl, which sat upon his countenance, might have augured as certainly the stroke of vengeance about to fall on some hapless victim, as he who views the red and lowering aspect of a Syrian sky at dawn may predict the approaching storm. Nor had his looks, as circumstances soon proved, been wholly unobserved by the bystanders. "No doubt tidings of the prophet's release have reached the high-priest's ears," said one to the other of two persons who were standing together under the colonnade near the entrance of the Sanhedrim, "and evil is again intended against him."

"Would to GOD," replied the other, "they were as active in planning how to defeat the counsels of the LORD'S enemies, as they are in persecuting His unoffending ambassador; and then there might even yet be hope for our beleaguered city. But now—" The voice of the venerable and aged

man here faltered; and wringing his hands, he looked imploringly towards heaven, while the silent tear unconsciously started into his eye, and fell upon his snow-white beard.

To foresee, under present circumstances, the rapidly approaching crisis of his country's sinking fortunes, might have appeared an easy task for the experienced eye of the sire; but he, who now spoke, had stronger evidence than merely his own forebodings to warn him. It was the aged Buzi, the father of Ezekiel. The pious and parental care bestowed in the training of his son's earlier years had borne but little fruit of comfort or consolation, such as the good father had hoped that his son would have been able to afford him in his declining days: for Ezekiel had been carried away into captivity just at the age when he was beginning to be a support and companion to his aged parent. Yet deeply as Buzi had felt at the moment the loss and privation of his son's society, his sorrow had been often since alleviated when he witnessed the persecutions that embittered the life of GOD'S sole surviving ambassador in Jerusalem. Honoured, as he felt, by his son's being called, among his brethren in captivity, to a similar holy office with that of Jeremiah, yet the father's heart naturally shrunk from the thought of seeing that son called to bear the same lot of ceaseless and harassing persecution which he daily saw the prophet obliged to endure. It was now, indeed, rather the son's turn to grieve, in anxiety for the parent who had so tenderly watched over the season

SEE PAGE 296.

of his childhood.* Clearly to him had been revealed, and through him to his fellows in captivity, the coming downfal of the holy city; and neither suckling nor hoary sire was to be spared. Regularly each year, as long as the embassy continued to go to and fro between Babylon and Jerusalem for the conveyance of the annual tribute, had Ezekiel sent tidings to his father, both of their state as prisoners among the heathen, and also of the oracles and revelations which the LORD had been pleased to make through him to his fellow-countrymen. These had left Buzi's pious mind in no doubt as to what would be the issue of the present siege and crisis in his country's fate; for to his eye, dimmed as it was by age, yet unclouded by the mists of prejudice or wilful sin, most manifest and clear were the apostacy, and rebellion, and obstinacy of his fellow-citizens. With the feelings not only of a warm patriot, but also of a Hebrew, a son of Abraham, a faithful and devoted servant of the LORD JEHOVAH, he still looked back fondly to the times, first of his own youthful days, and then to those of his country's youthful honours and heaven-protected career. The latter part of the penitent Manasseh's reign, followed by that of his exemplary son Josiah, had gladdened the heart of many a true Israelite; and Buzi had been one

* "It is probable that Buzi his (Ezekiel's) father had preserved his own family from the taint of idolatry, and had educated his son for the priestly office in all the learning of the Hebrews, and particularly in the study of their sacred books."—NEWCOME *on Ezekiel. Introduction*, p. 27.

who had cheerfully joined in the abolition of the idolatrous abuses prevalent before that time. Little had he anticipated that the evening of his life would see all these abominations renewed with double vigour, and at length increased to such a height as to call down the summary vengeance of the Almighty upon His people. The enthusiasm of youth and the warmth of holy zeal had not failed to picture to his glowing imagination in his earlier years the return of such days as those of Solomon and David, when from the river even unto the sea all was subject to the sceptre of Judah—when kings came from afar to see the glory of Israel—and when it was proclaimed far and wide by the voice of their national history that "there is a GOD that judgeth the earth."

Amid such bright anticipations and prospects had the spring of Buzi's life opened; how dark and lowering, alas! the storm which had already overclouded the autumn of his days, and which, by successive blasts, was destroying the promised harvest of his pious hopes. As he still daily trode those holy courts, and lingered around the hallowed sanctuary, scarcely could he convince himself that the sentence of final destruction would not even yet be withdrawn. On that very mount, he remembered, it had come to pass in former ages, long ere the LORD had honoured it by choosing it to set His name there, that the faithful patriarch had stood in obedience to JEHOVAH'S word—the very pile prepared, the sword unsheathed, and the arm uplifted in priestly attitude over the child of pro-

mise—yet GOD, even at that last moment, had opened a way of escape, and provided Himself with a substitute for the intended victim. Might He not do so now too, and spare that revered and much-loved house which He had caused to be built to His honour? Though He had suffered it to be stripped of its golden ornaments—with which, as a chaste virgin, it had been decked in the days of innocence—and to be robbed of many of its sacred utensils and treasures, to glut the avarice of the foreign spoiler, still these were but as the perishable foliage which fades, and may again, if there be but life in the parent stock, be restored in vernal freshness.

Thus would Buzi often inwardly argue with himself against the fears and convictions of his less hopeful hours. And if at other seasons he permitted himself to find for a while in such pious meditations a refuge from those melancholy forebodings, which now forced themselves on every thoughtful mind, much more did he occasionally indulge in such fond reveries, when he found himself, apart from the crowd, and engaged in the due discharge of his priestly office, within the very sanctuary of the LORD JEHOVAH. There, in the sacred retirement of solitude and silence, he would tarry, and mingle his earnest prayers and supplications with the wreathing volumes that arose from the golden altar of incense. As he watched the curling clouds of vapour mounting lightly upwards, and loading the air with their aromatic fragrance, he forgot not to entreat that the unworthy aspira-

tions and vows, which he had poured forth from his inmost heart, might similarly be borne heavenwards on the wings of mercy, and become an offering of sweet savour before the throne of the Most High.

On such occasions his thoughts would fain travel back to that memorable day when, on the first dedication of the temple, the heavenly cloud descended in the sight of the assembled nation, and wrapping in mysterious darkness the dwelling-place of the GOD of Israel, compelled even the priests to retire from their ministering duties while the glorious Inhabitant took possession of His new abode. And could it be, that this sacred emblem of the Divine presence, which had hallowed those holy walls from their first foundation—which even in earlier times had been, as a pillar of fire, the shelter of GOD's people from their Egyptian pursuers, and had led the chosen nation in safety and security from amid their manifold dangers, could it be brought to pass that this should be suddenly and entirely withdrawn? Should the steps of the stranger and the uncircumcised dare to profane not only the sacred spot, where he now knelt, but even the holy of holies, which, though within a few yards of him, was so jealously veiled from the common gaze that not even his eyes were permitted to behold it, nor his feet to draw near to it? Should it indeed be told among the heathen that the LORD had utterly forsaken His people, that He had given His temple to the spoiler, and His holy mountain to desolation?—Would not this be breaking the covenant that He had made with His servant David—nay,

which He had made even earlier with His people by the patriarch Jacob that "the sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh came?"

As he thus allowed the heart's fervent wishes from within to beget hopes of a kindred kind, and to persuade himself at last into a belief of their truth, he would, at the same time, gaze around upon the objects so familiar yet so hallowed in his eyes, and seek among them for fresh materials of consolation and encouragement. Near and around him were ranged in goodly order the ten golden candlesticks,* each with its sevenfold arms, spreading hither and thither like some stately cedar—their exquisite workmanship and graceful form, borrowed from no human design, but made after the very pattern shown by GOD to Moses in the mount—the soft light of their numerous lamps caught and reflected in various directions from the gilded cedar beams above, from the golden altar and table of shew-bread beneath, and from the polished surface of the doors and door-posts of olive wood, richly carved and inlaid as they were with precious stones and jewels—all thus combining to light up and display to full advantage the curiously wrought tracery and glowing colours of the vail which screened from human gaze the most holy place.

Buzi's reverence for these hallowed symbols, which by GOD's own appointment graced the ante-

* See 1 Kings vii. 49.

chamber of His earthly dwelling place, had not only grown with his growth, and strengthened with his years from earliest youth, but had been inherited from his forefathers. No wonder then that the accumulated respect and love of successive generations, which had thus entwined itself with every better feeling of the heart, could not bear without many a painful effort, to be parted even in anticipation from that to which it had so long clung. Buzi still dared to hope, in spite of all his doubts, and difficulties, and discouragements: and yet many such now continually befell him.

That very morning as he had just come forth alone from the sanctuary after the due discharge of his priestly office, his bosom still glowing with holy hope that GOD would at length hear his prayers and turn the hearts of his fellow countrymen from their sins—lost as he was for the time in a train of such happy thoughts and pious visions of the future, he had passed almost unconsciously through the court of the priests, and thence through that of the Israelites to the north gate which communicated with the outer court. At this point sounds and sights suddenly burst upon his senses, which, alas! speedily and rudely dispelled the fair visions that his imagination had been busy in picturing to him. Loud and passionate lamentations were heard—the shrill voices of women, mingled with the plaintive notes of pipes, but drowned occasionally by wild and incoherent outbursts of grief, scarcely to be mistaken for the accents of natural and genuine sorrow, yet differing from the usual

manner of hired mourners or minstrels. A few steps more brought Buzi in view of the group from which these sounds proceeded. It consisted of women of various ages. They were busily engaged in all the violent gesticulations by which grief was wont to be outwardly expressed—some beating on their breasts and limbs, with loud and repeated blows—others apparently tearing, or grasping violently, the hair that hung loosely about their necks and shoulders—and many rolling themselves with their faces on the pavement, around an image which was erected near the entrance gateway. "Whither, whither is he gone?" cried a harsh but female voice, at its highest pitch. "Return, O beauteous, O beloved Adonis; the voice of Milcah calls thee. Return to the arms of the fair goddess who delighted in thee."—"Return, return," cried the whole chorus of shrill voices, "or we will die here around thy deserted couch. Oh! Thammuz, have we not wept for thee during the night? and lo! the morning hath brought us no joy."*

Far more bitter than all their assumed sorrow was the real grief of Buzi at such a sight. The truth now quickly burst upon his mind. It was the annual season for the lamentation of Adonis;†

* See NEWCOME *on Ezekiel*, chap. viii., and *Univ. Hist.* Vol. I. p. 401.

† It is probable that under the idolatrous kings of Judah who brought in the worship of Tammuz this festival fell in the month that answered to the fourth month of the Jews, corresponding with a part of our June and July.—See LOWTH'S *Commentary on Ezekiel*, c. viii. p. 14.

and here even in JEHOVAH'S courts the women of Judah ventured to celebrate those impure and idolatrous rites. Could it be wondered at if the LORD was, by such abominations and such bold effrontery in pursuing them, provoked to jealousy? In vain did Buzi make the effort and lift up his voice to warn these shameless votaries of heathen pollutions. They drowned his words with louder outcries than before, till he retired, hiding his face and smiting his hands together, in sorrow and holy indignation. Year after year he had endeavoured, both by his own authority and by whatever assistance he could gain from other quarters, to put down such forbidden customs. In vain had he entreated the interposition of Seraiah the high-priest; it had been denied him. And though he was aware that the usual season had returned again for the annual celebration of these rites, after the ingathering of the summer fruits, yet amid the overpowering weight of the present distress, it had escaped his recollection until the scene itself burst unexpectedly upon his sight. Even as he saw it now, it was indeed different from what it had been in former years. Famine and death, and misery in various forms, had thinned the number of Judah's apostate daughters; but still there remained many like Milcah, the wife of Dascon, bold as before, and firmly wedded as ever to those sinful customs.

It was but a few moments after witnessing a scene so painful to his feelings that Buzi was met near the eastern gate of the priests' court by a friend, upon whose careworn countenance a passing

smile seemed to tell of a heart lightened for a while from habitual sorrow. As he caught sight of Buzi his features seemed to lighten up with even a brighter glow, such as anticipated sympathy, whether in sorrow or in joy, is wont to produce. Habited in the usual dress of his order, the flowing linen robes, and bearing at his side, as a badge and a ready instrument of his calling, the inkhorn and writing instruments, Baruch the scribe approached with reverence, bowing himself, and making obeisance to the aged priest and sire.

"Peace, thou son of Neriah," said Buzi, as they came near each other, "if peace be ever again destined to visit our unhappy city."—"Peace," replied Baruch; "and may the LORD in His mercy yet send us peace. I was seeking thee, my father, to report to thee some better tidings than I have of late been wont to bring. It hath pleased the LORD to turn again the heart of the king, and he hath released the prophet by the hands of Ebedmelech, the king's chamberlain, from the dungeon into which they had cast him. And even now my lord the king hath sent and fetched him secretly that he may inquire of him if there be still any tidings from the LORD. Oh! that it may please Him, in whose hand are the hearts of kings, who turneth them whithersoever He will, to bring it to pass that the king our master shall listen to the voice of the prophet, and obey the words of the LORD."

Scarcely had Baruch finished speaking when his eyes were met by the angry looks of Seraiah, hastily crossing, as it has been described, from the council

hall of the Sanhedrim towards the city. On recognising Baruch, the faithful attendant of Jeremiah, a still darker frown seemed to gather over the features of the high-priest. Baruch's fears were accordingly once more awakened, and were expressed to Buzi in almost the same breath in which he had just been describing the more hopeful prospect that appeared but now to have opened upon them.

FIRE-WORSHIPPERS. VERY ANCIENT PERSIAN OR PARTHIAN COIN.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"The subject of this affection (generous grief) is, not the ungodly themselves, who are professed transgressors of this law; they rather make a sport of sin, as Solomon speaks; but the godly are they that are affected with this sorrow, such as are careful observers of the law themselves, and mourn first for their own breaches; for these are the only fit mourners for the transgression of others. Whence arise those public miseries of nations and kingdoms, but from the epidemic national sins of the people as the deserving and procuring cause at GOD'S hand? Ungodly men though they meddle not with public affairs at all, yea though they be faithful and honest in meddling with them, yet by reason of their impious lives are traitors to their nation: they are truly the incendiaries of states and kingdoms. And these mourners, though they can do no more, are the most loyal and most serviceable subjects, bringing tears to quench the fire of wrath. Tears spent for worldly crosses are all lost; they run all to waste; they are empty fruitless things. But tears shed for the breach of GOD'S law are the means to quench GOD'S wrath. The prayers and tears of some few may avert the punishment of many, yea of a whole land. This mourning for other men's wickedness both testifies and preserves the godly man's innocence."—LEIGHTON.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"For if Thou didst punish the enemies of Thy children and the condemned to death with such deliberation, giving them time and place whereby they might be delivered from their malice; with how great circumspection didst Thou judge Thine own sons, unto whose fathers Thou hast sworn and made covenants of good promises."—*Wisdom of Solomon* xii. 20.

SAD and cheerless was the conversation which the two friends held together as they paced awhile the shady porticos of the Temple court. Many a tale of prison-woe had Baruch to relate. Long familiar with the interior of the prison by reason of his assiduous attendance on the prophet, he had had ample opportunities of learning the history of many who were confined there. Often would the unfortunate victims of the princes' jealous suspicion, who had been seized and incarcerated on some vague charges of treachery, pour their complaints into Baruch's compassionate ear. Seized and bound upon accusations utterly groundless, yet they had been far from able, however innocent, to contend against such powerful enemies—and

once accused it became dangerous even for their nearest friends to show sympathy in their cause. Frequently had Baruch's heart been melted at the daily scene of suspense and disappointment which he had witnessed within those walls. In some few instances perhaps the hard-wrung bribe had succeeded in opening the gates to the weary captive, and had restored him to a dearly-bought freedom; but where such means were wanting, the loudest claims for justice or pity were unheard. Day after day, and month after month passed on and the heart sickening over its own hopeless fate slowly fretted life away, like the caged bird which beats its frail body against the bars, and wastes its last breath in ineffectual struggles to escape.

Buzi after listening in sorrow to the distressing details of the miseries which daily met Baruch's eyes, seemed lost for a while in silent thought and meditation, as though he were pondering over any means which might be suggested for relieving the sufferings of his unhappy fellow-countrymen. "Woe, woe is us," he at length exclaimed, "what hope is there for us so long as we continue thus perversely to forsake the ways of the LORD JEHOVAH and to walk after the abominations of the heathen? Behold now when we ought to be preparing according to the season of the year to celebrate the feast of weeks, and to honour the LORD with the first fruits of our increase, how have we set at nought His ordinances and His statutes. In these sacred courts where we ought to have been declaring the LORD'S goodness, and offering to Him of the pro-

duce of the earth which He would have caused it to bear unto us, if we had obeyed Him, are not our wives and daughters even at this hour polluting themselves with the false and filthy rites of the nations around us?"—"Yea, it is even so," said the aged priest raising his voice and speaking with greater energy as he observed others around him listening to his words. "It is even so, and in the very temple of the LORD no man careth for His honour."—"Go to now," exclaimed a voice, which the bystanders seemed at once to recognise as that of a person in authority; "what meaneth this clamour that I hear? What, thou son of Neriah, art thou here again to report further tidings from that dreamer of Anathoth? Knowest thou not that the princes have put him in ward but yesterday, according to the command of the king? And so may it fall out with all traitors to their country. Beware, thou son of Neriah, lest a like thing happen to thee. For by the life of Baal, thou art but leaning on a bruised reed, if thou trustest thy safety to the prophet who hath not been able to save himself."

This was spoken by Zephaniah, the second priest or deputy of Seraiah, who as he was accidentally descending from the chamber of Hanan, the son of Igdaliah,* had caught Buzi's concluding words, and had supposed at the moment that Baruch, upon whom his eyes first fell, was the speaker of them. But he quickly perceived his

* See Jer. xxxv. 4.

mistake, and observed, not without some little shame, the calm and dignified look of the aged Buzi fixed upon him, as he was venting his haughty threats and invectives against Baruch and the prophet.

Before Baruch had time to reply, Buzi with a manner earnest, but firm and gentle, answered, "Say not, thou son of Maaseiah, that it is we who trust to a bruised reed, while our confidence is in the words of the prophet of the Most High God. Verily it is thou and the princes thy associates who are relying upon a bruised reed, inasmuch as ye have 'trusted in man and made flesh your arm, and your hearts have departed from the LORD.' To what hath the LORD compared such as do these things? 'to heath in the desert; to inhabitants of a salt land, of parched places in the wilderness.'* And hast thou not heard what were the words of Ahab king of Israel, and what the prophet Elijah answered him? 'I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.' And where is now the house of Ahab? Is there a man of them left to stand before the LORD? or is not his name clean put out? And where is the city of his fathers? where is now Samaria, and her children? She who once boasted that she had ten parts in Israel—alas! where is she? Truly the LORD was long suffering towards her. As long as she forsook Him not

* See Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

utterly, He was her shield and defence. He defeated the counsels of her enemies, and suffered them not to prevail against her. 'Then thousands fled before the hundreds of Israel,' and the 'terror of the LORD was a wall of brass unto her.' But she forsook the LORD her strength and set up the idols of her abominations from Dan even to Bethel. And behold now is she not with her children in captivity? And hath not the LORD by His prophets foretold the same of us too, thou son of Maaseiah, if we do not speedily repent and turn unto Him and bow to the rod of His chastening? Are not His sore judgments already among us? Are not the sounds of the dead, and the dying, day and night in our ears? yea even now when we ought to be rejoicing before the LORD, as in former years at His appointed feast, and honouring Him with the first fruits of the earth. Seemeth it then a strange thing, Zephaniah, that our GOD should visit for these things? And canst thou, the priest of the Most High, look upon this His temple and see it profaned in the sight of this sun by the foulest abominations of the heathen, and yet not tremble lest the LORD should indeed forsake it and give it over to the hands of the spoiler and destroyer?"

With all the fervent eloquence of a heart whose earnest feelings could not be satisfied till it beheld a kindred warmth stirred in the breast of others, Buzi would have continued his warnings and his appeal in behalf of GOD'S honour had he not been interrupted by a question from Zephaniah.

"What is this that I hear?" asked he. "Shall a priest of the LORD liken Samaria to Mount Zion, which the LORD hath chosen for Himself? What agreement is there between the house of Ahab, upon which the curse of the LORD hath lighted, and the house of our father David, with whom the LORD established His covenant, and to whom He promised His sure mercies?—or what have the high places of Dan and Bethel to do with the temple which the LORD hath caused to be built for His honour? Hath it not been declared of old time that whom the LORD hath separated and chosen to come near unto Him, they shall come near unto Him, and none other?* And was it not because Korah and his company transgressed in this matter, and would have taken upon them the priest's office, not being of the seed of Aaron, that the LORD caused the earth to open her mouth, and swallow them up alive? Why marvel, therefore, if the LORD hath also overthrown the altars of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin—and if He hath caused those to perish whom Jeroboam made priests of the lowest of the people? And hast thou forgotten, Buzi, how in the days of David the LORD'S anger was kindled against Uzzah, the son of Abinadab, because he, not being of the priesthood, put forth his hand to the ark of GOD? Therefore is it that the LORD'S wrath waxed hot against Ephraim—therefore hath He given Samaria and her children to the spoiler and

* See Numb. xvi.

the conqueror — because she forsook the house wherein He dwelleth. Her children came not up to Jerusalem, to the city of the LORD of hosts. Therefore He hath broken their strength as a potsherd, and delivered them up to their enemies. But are we not of the seed and family of Aaron? And hath not the LORD Himself separated us to minister unto Him? And is not this place where we now stand the Temple of JEHOVAH, the GOD of Israel, the place of His habitation, which He hath loved more than all the gates of the daughter of Zion? And shall this be as Samaria? Shall the mountain of the LORD's house indeed become heaps? GOD do so unto me and more also if the head of the man who sayeth these things had stood on him this day, except it had been thou, Buzi. But for thine hoary hairs, and for thine office' sake, as a priest of GOD, I will forbear to tell it unto the princes, lest they do unto thee as they did but yesterday unto the prophet of Anathoth."

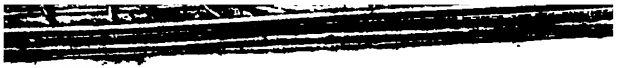
"Fear not for me," replied Buzi, "but for thyself and the princes thy companions. I am this day more than fourscore years old. How long then have I to live that I should fear what man can do unto me? Would that I had been gathered in peace unto my fathers before this day of rebuke and blasphemy had come upon my people! But the LORD hath been merciful to me, and hath granted me to see Jerusalem in prosperity in the days of my youth. And now be it unto me according to His will. He hath given, He hath taken away; blessed be His name. But let not

thy proud heart think, thou son of Maaseiah, because the LORD hath spared us unto this day, while our sister Samaria hath perished in her transgressions, that we are without sin in His sight. Yea rather, is not our sin greater than hers, if we take not warning by our sister's fall? Thou wast right in that thou saidst of her, that she had transgressed in forsaking the Temple of the LORD and setting up her idols in Dan and Bethel, and in making unto her priests whom the LORD had not sanctified. And therefore hath desolation come up upon her, as an armed man—destruction hath overtaken her as the blast of the desert. But with us the LORD still dealeth as with sons. He bids us bow to His rod for a season, and submit ourselves to His appointed punishment; and then may this holy Temple be spared from the hand of the destroyer. Yet if we harden our hearts, and give not our neck to the yoke which it seemeth good to Him to lay upon us, how shall we escape the furiousness of His wrath? Hitherto He hath spared us, as the tenderest of fathers would spare his only son. Ask and see whether He hath dealt so with other nations. Inquire and know whether He hath given them any such gracious promises. Even this proud Babylon, whose armies now surround our city, how hath the LORD foretold utter destruction against her! Hath He not long since declared by His prophet, 'Babylon, the glory of kingdoms and the beauty of the Chaldee's excellency, shall be as when GOD overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither

shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation.'* Again, what hath GOD spoken concerning her by the mouth of that very prophet against whose safety thou hast even now conspired? 'When thou comest to Babylon, it shall be when thou hast made an end of reading this book, that thou shalt bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of Euphrates—and thou shalt say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her.'† What hath He spoken concerning Edom? 'My sword shall be bathed in heaven; behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of My curse to judgment. * * The streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever; from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.'‡ And lastly, what of Egypt, upon whom in our blindness we have leant for help? 'Go up into Gilead, and take balm, O virgin daughter of Egypt: in vain shalt thou use many medicines; for thou shalt not be cured.'§ Mark the righteous sentence of the LORD upon these nations, Zephaniah; and now hear what He hath said of His people Judah and of Jerusalem, His holy city, 'Fear not thou, O Jacob, My servant, for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee; but I will

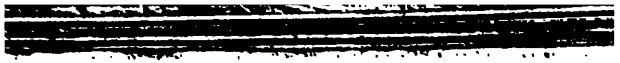
* Isaiah xiii. 19. † Jer. li. 61.
‡ Isaiah xxxiv. 5, 9, 10. § Jer. xlvi. 11.

THE SABBATH-BREAKER. SEE PAGE 318.



it necessary for GOD'S honour that He should spare this wicked generation; nay, nor even that He should deliver this His holy Temple. 'Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD?' And is it not written that 'rebellion is in His sight as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness as iniquity and idolatry?' Of what profit then is it still to tread His courts while our heart is far from Him? Shall this save us from His wrath? and why do we worship the false gods of the heathen? Will He suffer His name thus to be forgotten on the earth? No. He hath said, 'Ye shall not be as the nations to worship wood and stone.' He hath set us to testify against such abominations; and if we do not so by our obedience, surely he will cause us to bear testimony to Him by our punishment. He hath set the two before us, and we must choose therefore whether of the twain we will have. Oh! let us not then cast His mercies behind us. Let us even now turn and humble ourselves before Him in sackcloth and ashes. 'Who knoweth, Zephaniah, if He will even yet return, and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him?'"

"Amen! amen!" said Baruch, as the aged priest now leant upon him for support, wearied and exhausted by his earnest efforts in the cause of truth and righteousness. Zephaniah gladly seized the opportunity, and with a smile of scorn and incredulity left the spot, and passed rapidly on in the direction which he had observed Seraiah to take a short time before.



CHAPTER XIX.

"Thus we see how Nineveh, Babylon, Tyre, and Egypt, the great adversaries and oppressors of the Jews, have been visited by Divine vengeance for their enmity and cruelty to the people of GOD. Not that we must think GOD so partial as to punish these nations only for the sake of the Jews; they were guilty of other flagrant sins, for which the prophets denounced the Divine judgments upon them. Egypt in particular was severely threatened by the prophet Ezekiel, for her idolatry, her pride, and her wickedness. * * * It is an excellent political aphorism of the wisest of kings, and all history will bear witness to the truth of it, that 'Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people.'"—NEWTON *On the Prophecies*, Diss. xii.

THE WAILING PLACE OF THE JEWS.

THE PILLAR OF ABSALOM. SEE PAGE 33.

CHAPTER XIX.

"At sultry noon too when our toils were done,
We to the gloomy glen were wont to run;
There on the turf we lay, while at our feet
The cooling rivulet rippled softly sweet,
And mused on holy theme and ancient lore,
Of deeds and days and heroes now no more;
Heard as his solemn harp Isaiah swept,
Sung woe unto the wicked land—and wept;
Or fancy-led, saw Jeremiah mourn
In solemn sorrow o'er Judea's urn."

KIRKE WHITE. *Childhood*, Part II., 145.

DIFFICULTIES and disasters had on many former occasions assailed the daughter of Judah. Armies had encompassed her walls, and the voice of the haughty foe had been heard in loud and exulting tones at her gates, threatening to overthrow from its foundations her mountain throne. But in those previous afflictions she and her children "had sought the LORD, and turned them early and inquired after GOD, and remembered that GOD was their strength and the high GOD their Redeemer."

So long there was mercy for Judah. But "to clear the guilty," to spare the impenitent and

hardened, is no part of mercy. And such had Jerusalem, her king, her princes, and her people now become.

The rays of the rising sun were still on that morning, as in former times, reflected from the long rows of polished and snow-white marble pillars—from the many parti-coloured pavements, and gilded pinnacles of the temple—the noble gateways, which formed the entrances to the several courts, still reared their heads aloft, the folding leaves of their spacious doors thrown widely open to court as it were the approach of the numerous worshippers whom they seemed waiting to usher into the presence-chamber of the GOD of Israel—their massive pillars proud to bear above them the spacious council chambers where the priests and elders of the congregation were wont to meet—all these things still remained the same—but there was no longer seen, as in the days of Hezekiah—the king at the head of the congregation and in the sight of open day humbling himself, and making his earnest confession in those holy courts before the LORD—and moreover not content with doing so in his own person, but publicly sending his messenger clad in sackcloth to the LORD'S prophet to beg his intercession in the day of rebuke and blasphemy.

A far different scene was passing now on that selfsame spot where Hezekiah had formerly knelt. As the eye of the spectator who stood in the women's court of the temple gazed through the wide arch of the gateway, which separated that court from the court of Israel, and caught, in

regular perspective beyond it, the view successively of the great altar, the porch, and the sanctuary, there was seen also just within the court another conspicuous and well known object. Connected by a covered way with the buildings or cloister on the southern side, but exactly over against the great altar of burnt offerings, was placed the throne or pillar of the king. An elevated platform of costly and elaborately wrought brass work, resting against a single shaft or pillar, which itself supported a light but spreading canopy, formed the seat of state or "covert of the Sabbath," where on solemn occasions the kings of Judah took their place at the head of the congregation.*

It was there that Solomon in the presence of all Israel had on his bended knees, poured forth that noble prayer at the first dedication of the temple.† It was there that he had stood, and with hands spread forth to heaven, had blessed all the people, invoking the continuance of GOD's fatherly protection on them, and acknowledging in their name, that "there had not hitherto failed one word of all the LORD's good promises which He had promised by the hand of Moses His servant." It was there that subsequently the youthful Joash, rescued as he had providentially been in infancy by his sister Jehosheba, from the murderous hands of Queen Athaliah, and now left as the only surviving male branch of the house of Ahaziah, had been first

* See 2 Kings xi. xiv. 23, 3, and 2 Chron. xxxiv. 31.

† 1 Kings viii. 24.

publicly shown by his guardian the pious Jehoiada to the assembled people. There in his seventh year he had received, amid the acclamations of his subjects, the crown of his father—there the holy oil had been poured by the hands of the high-priest on the brow of the LORD'S anointed, still fresh as it was with the bloom of early childhood—and there had the youthful monarch once more renewed the covenant with GOD, that the people and their king should be the people of the LORD.*

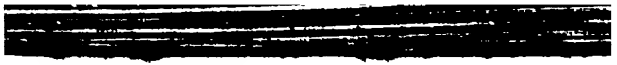
But the spot which had been hitherto sought for occasions of the greatest solemnity and publicity before GOD and man, was on this day converted into the secret lurking place for conscious guilt and fear. The entry which led immediately to the elevated platform on which the throne stood, formed a small ante-chamber for the king's private use; and a covered way from the gate Shallecheth communicated with it, so that the sovereign in resorting to the temple at any time might, if he should so desire, continue unobserved, until he reached the conspicuous position purposely assigned to him.

As Seraiah in leaving the temple that morning had taken the direction which led him close by this private chamber, called the king's entry, angry and indignant at the tidings which his confederate princes had just communicated to him in the Sanhedrim, little did he suppose that the very two persons against whom his anger was chiefly kindled,

* 2 Kings xi.

SAMUEL AND DAVID.

SEE PAGE 321.



were at the moment within a few paces of him, and almost within hearing of his but half suppressed murmurs of vengeance. Into the small ante-chamber already mentioned, the king had caused Jeremiah to be privately conducted from the court of the prison, that he might there once more secretly hold a conference with him.* Ashamed of

* See Jeremiah xxxviii. 14, upon which passage Blayney has the following note:—"It appears that from the king's house to the temple Solomon formed a communication which was called 'the king's ascent by which he went up to the house of JEHOVAH,' and was of so excellent a structure that it is reckoned as one of the things that raised the Queen of Sheba's astonishment at Solomon's wisdom and magnificence. This we find to have extended to one of the western gates of the temple, called Shallecheth, which is said to have been 'by the causey of the going up or ascent' above mentioned. 1 Chron. xxvi. 16. Now this I conclude to have been *the first entrance*. From the gate Shallecheth there must have been a passage the whole length of the south side of the building of the sanctuary, extending straight forward till the king faced about to the left in order to go to his place in the court, where he is said to have stood before the altar. 2 Chron. vi. 12. From the gate Shallecheth therefore to this turning I look upon to have been *the second entrance*, and the same that is called 'the king's entry without.' 2 Kings xvi. 18. *The third entrance* then, I conceive to have been the continuance of the same approach from the turning above mentioned, till it terminated with 'the brazen scaffold' on which Solomon stood in the midst of the court, right over against the altar, in the presence of the whole congregation of Israel. 2 Chron. vi. 12. This is expressly called 'the entrance,' where 'the king stood at or upon his pillar,' 2 Chron. xxiii. 13, the pillar being most probably the support on which the scaffold or pulpit rested. This entrance I am also inclined to think is that which is called 'the covert of

its being known by others that he was seeking counsel of one whose life he had only the day before given up into the hands of conspirators, and moreover in his own mind far from determined to follow any advice which the prophet might offer, yet Zedekiah's conscience would not allow him to rest till he had again inquired of the LORD'S ambassador if further tidings from the LORD were still to be obtained. Like his first predecessor on the throne of Israel, who in the hour of distress and abandonment sought counsel at Endor, under the shelter of disguise and darkness, from her whose unhallowed arts he had forbidden throughout the land, so Zedekiah came but to hear his own sentence which conscience had long ago pronounced, now repeated by lips which the LORD'S hand had touched. A vague hope perhaps still lingered in his mind—a hope such as in every age lures thousands to destruction, that what the LORD had threatened He would not perform—that without any change on man's part GOD would yet be prevailed on to alter His plans. In the season of doubt GOD'S prophet was unquestionably the

the Sabbath,' 2 Kings xvi. 18, being covered over for the king's accommodation when he appeared in the temple on the Sabbath day at the head of the congregation of Israel. To this as the most retired place king Zedekiah may be understood to have brought the prophet in order to confer with him with the greatest privacy. For the better understanding of what is here laid down, I would refer the reader to the plan of Solomon's Temple in Ancient Universal History, Vol. I. Book I. Chap. 7."

proper person to apply to; yet was it to be expected that GOD would consent to be inquired of through His prophet by one who had but a few hours before surrendered that prophet into the hands of the enemies that sought his life? Was it like sincerity, was it consistent with kingly dignity to make the request? But true dignity is the companion of innocence, as consistency is of firm and upright principle. Zedekiah unhappily now possessed neither. Weakly and timidly had he given way against his conscience to the request of the princes—treacherously had he broken his oath to the king of Babylon, and profanely given up GOD'S prophet to the designs of malicious foes. With such ingredients had his own hand filled the bitter cup of humiliation and remorse which he was now about to drink.

It was again mid-day, and the heat of the meridian sun had driven all but the houseless to the shelter of their dwellings. Crowds of the poorest and most destitute were huddled together under any temporary shade that could be found, their lips parched with feverish thirst, their limbs shrunken and nerveless for want of wholesome and nutritious food. The guards upon the walls had retired mostly to the gateways, or to the nearest towers on the battlements. The busy stir and excitement of the morning had necessarily subsided, and a brief armistice between the hostile armies of the besiegers and the besieged seemed tacitly to have been agreed upon during the extreme heat of the day. A dull and heavy silence prevailed

throughout the city, only different from that of the night in there being less hope of a cooler temperature to relieve those who were suffering from drought or fever.

The king after his secret visit to the temple had returned again to the palace, and Baruch had parted from his aged and revered friend Buzi to await either the prophet himself, or to gain any tidings of him which might have reached his former companions in the court of the prison. A short time sufficed to terminate his suspense. Jeremiah soon re-entered the court of the prison—but not with the expression of hope or cheerfulness which Baruch had almost allowed himself to anticipate. The announcement of good tidings had long indeed been the prophet's "strange work." To one only, and him a stranger, had there of late been any message of gladness from the LORD. To him who had saved the prophet's life, after the king had surrendered it—to him who had with his own hands raised that prophet from the dungeon where he had been left to perish—to Ebedmelech the Cushite alone of all in Jerusalem had the prophet been allowed to promise that his life should be spared in the destruction of the city. In vain, therefore, did Baruch now anxiously look to his inspired companion and friend for an answer of peace. The prophet could give him no such answer. His late interview with the king had opened no prospect of brighter hopes. Few and brief had been the words which they had exchanged with each other—fresh promises from the LORD by His prophet, upon con-

dition of the king's submitting even at that late hour to the divinely appointed punishment for his own and his nation's sins—fresh fears and doubts on the part of the king, ending as before in the rejection of the LORD'S counsels, and in the indulgence of his own weak and misguided heart. The king and the prophet had now parted for the last time, and the result of what had passed in that secret interview, for secret and stealthy it had been, though held in the very centre of the LORD'S temple, was shortly to be proclaimed by fearful facts not only in the streets and broad places of Jerusalem, but throughout the world, for a warning to the nations of the earth, and a signal monument to all posterity of the divine justice which spares not hardened and obstinate guilt, whether in king or subject, whether in empires or individuals, whether found among strangers and foreigners, or in the nation chosen from all the nations of the earth to be the LORD'S people and His own peculiar inheritance.

CHAPTER XX.

"Though the tempter seems to be playing such a game in the world, GOD will go beyond him and turn that to illustration and confirmation which he intended for confusion and extirpation of the truth."—BAXTER.

CHAPTER XX.

"They, who dragged to Shinar's fiery sand,
Tilled with reluctant strength the stranger's land,
Who sadly told the slow revolving years,
And steeped the captive's bitter bread with tears."

HEBER'S *Palestine.*

"This day a solemn feast the people hold
To Dagon, their sea-idol, and forbid
Laborious work. Unwillingly this rest
Their superstition yields me; hence with leave
Retiring from the popular noise, I seek
This unfrequented place, to find some ease—
Ease to the body some—none to the mind,
From restless thoughts, that, like a deadly swarm
Of hornets armed, no sooner found alone,
But rush upon me thronging and present
Times past—what once I was and what am now."

Samson Agonistes.

IF "prophecy be but Divine history,"* the narrative before the event, as it has been rightly termed, history may similarly in its turn be not unjustly called the mirror of the future. For look

* Lord Bacon.

back to ages past, and we see, alas! but the image of ages present and ages yet to come. Man in every age is the same frail, sinful being—he transgresses, and he is chastened—he repents awhile, and the hand of correction is withdrawn—again he adds sin to sin, and brings down upon himself no longer the rod of gentle chastisement, but the sword of destruction. Meanwhile, He who rules above is ever the same. "He will by no means acquit the guilty." He will show mercy to thousands in them that love and obey Him. This record stands true and unshaken from generation to generation. The silent finger of history points to those monuments of the past—the still small voice of conscience adds its testimony from within, alike declaring that the rule is still the same. Yet each successive generation repeats the acts of its predecessor, treads in the same steps, and falls at last into the same pit of self-sought misery. The mirror has been true and faithful, but we have refused to see betimes the image which it represented. Folly makes us heedless—custom blinds our eyes—sinful inclinations divert our attention—and so we live unchanged, unconvinced, unwarned by the past.

In what age or nation has it not been so? Judah had seen her sister fall, but she heeded it not. She had been reminded that it was "when Ephraim spake trembling," that he had exalted himself in Israel—but the word of warning or of encouragement she alike forgot. She had been herself in earlier days in bondage with her children—and

had been wonderfully delivered. She had been herself made the instrument of punishing others for their sins. But all had passed away from her memory, as the shadow from the dial. The lesson therefore which she had refused to learn while dwelling in her own land in ease and plenty, and while clad in the garments of peace and gladness, she was now to be taught, sitting as a stranger in the sackcloth and ashes of captivity—eating the bread of affliction, and mingling her drink with tears.

Beneath the shade of a long row of willows which fringed the banks of a rapidly-flowing stream, there was seen at eventide a little group of women, engaged apparently in earnest and anxious conversation with each other. The low and subdued tone in which they spoke, combined with the grief-worn countenances of the speakers, seemed to indicate circumstances of deep sorrow and affliction. They had evidently chosen the spot on account of its retirement and privacy. Yet even there they were not unfrequently interrupted by chance passengers, either fishermen who had been engaged during the day in catching or drying their fish on the river's banks, and were now returning homewards —or stragglers, who wandered in that direction for the purpose of enjoying the cool and refreshing air of the waterside. The eye might quickly have detected, if only by the dress and mien of those who composed that little group, that they were strangers and foreigners in the country. But a closer observation afforded clearer and, alas! more painful

proofs of the same fact. Sad as appeared to be the subject of their present thoughts and conversation, yet few of those who approached the spot to which they had retired could refrain from adding to their grief by some passing taunt or insult. Either some uncouth term of reproach, some unfeeling demand, or galling jest was ready upon the lips of each in succession who came near enough to recognise the unhappy and unprotected victims of their scorn.

Among them one younger than the rest seemed to feel bitterly the trying circumstances in which she was at present placed. Her youthful features —delicate, yet stamped with the ingenuous expression of high birth and noble ancestry—free from every trace of pride or haughtiness, yet challenging respect by the look full of inward though unconscious innocence which characterised them—were again and again suffused with the crimson glow of shame as the reproaches of the passengers reached her ears. A favourable interval at length seemed to offer itself for venting her grief aloud. The sound of the last footstep had died away, and no one could be seen in either direction approaching towards them.

"Alas! my mother," she exclaimed, as the tears chased each other swiftly down her face, "how shall we bear these things? Can I live and daily hear thee laden with the revilings of every idle tongue, and pointed at with the finger of scorn by the hand of every one that meets us in the way? And shall our beloved country and the city of our GOD, shall

they be ever thus slandered before our face? Oh! that I could once more behold her hills and fruitful valleys! Oh! Jerusalem, city of my fathers, would that I could again delight my eyes with the sight of thee, even, alas! in thy ruins! How gladly would I receive, if it were but enough to set my foot on, of the least fertile among thy hills, for the whole length and breadth of these dreary plains! Oh! my mother, was this the repose and rest which we promised ourselves after our weary journey? Would that the way had been sevenfold longer!—would that we were again but just commencing it, and its toils tenfold more bitter, so that we could only be removed from the sight and hearing of this proud Babylon. Oh! why hath the GOD of our fathers dealt so with us? Surely we are His people. We are called by His name. Why then do these heathen revile us at their pleasure? Why are we in bonds and a byword to the nations of the earth?"

"Peace, peace, my daughter," said Hadassah; for it was Miriam who had poured forth these accents of grief, which would no longer bear to be suppressed; "be patient; and who knoweth but the LORD may yet turn again from His fierce anger, and bestow a blessing upon His afflicted people? Truly this is a season of reproach and of bondage. We are exiles, and our country is desolate. But we have transgressed the laws of our GOD; we have sinned with our fathers. Reproach not the LORD, my child. I and thy father have done amiss; and it is we who have brought this misery upon

our children. It was we who offered incense upon the altars of strange gods.

"LORD of heaven and earth!" exclaimed Hadassah, looking upwards, as she clasped Miriam to her bosom, "spare these children; for what have they done? We their parents are guilty. Let us bear the rod of Thy chastisement, for we have deserved it. Would that we were again, my daughter, in our own holy city, that we might weep day and night among her ruins for the desolation which our rebellion hath brought upon her. But this mighty Babylon hath now become the home of our captivity; and we must bear the rebuke which the LORD hath laid on us. But though our feet must still tread a foreign soil, and our eyes pine in vain amid these plains for the mountains of our native land, yet, my child, our thoughts are still our own; and often shall they travel back to fair Judah's hills and vales. Faithfully shall they linger in fond recollection around each beloved spot. The conqueror who hath transported us to his own country can still bind our limbs in fetters, but our hearts, my child, he can no more estrange from the land of our fathers than he can transplant hither the cedars which crown her mountain heights, or the vines which clothe her sloping hill sides.

"And it shall be my Miriam's daily task to train, as she was wont to do in happier times, the voices of her younger sisters to the holy lays of Zion's melodies, not in order that we may repeat them as hireling minstrels at the bidding of the profane and the scoffer—no: let my right hand rather forget

her cunning than stoop to aught so base—but that even in this land of our captivity we may learn to worship the GOD of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, as our fathers did before us, and to sing the praises of His holy name, that He may not wholly forget His people in their affliction.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if my tears were as plentiful as the waters of this mighty river, which is hurrying by us, how willingly could I shed them all, when I remember thy ruined altars and thy holy temple, where we have so often raised the voice of melody to our GOD! How do my very heartstrings still vibrate to the sweet sounds of harp and tabret, and holy minstrelsy, as they echoed around the courts of thy sanctuary! Dear, dear shall the very stones of those sacred walls be unto me, and my tongue shall speak of their praises while I have my being.

"And now, my daughter, let not thy heart be thus heavy within thee, lest the foe laugh us even yet more to scorn. The LORD hath promised in His mercy to bring again our captivity, and His word shall not fail. The day shall yet come when 'our mouth shall be filled with laughter and our tongue with joy.' Let us not be guilty of doubting it—yea, rather let it be as the balm of Gilead to our wounded spirits; let it be to us as the seed which the husbandman casteth upon the earth, and which he waiteth for in patience till the early and the latter rain hath fallen upon it, that it may bring forth fruit and increase. And may our good GOD speedily accomplish His gracious purpose,

that we who have sown in tears may reap in joy!"

"Rise, Miriam," said the gentle voice of one of her companions, to whom Hadassah had made a sign as she ceased speaking. "Rise and redeem the promise which at noon this day, ere we left the city, thine own lips sealed in the presence of us all." —"What promise?" asked Miriam, in surprise. "Thy promise," replied her companion, "to relate to us what befell thee during the siege and destruction of our beloved city, and also what happened along the weary way by which thou camest to this land of our captivity. For think not, Miriam, that though we have been absent since the days of our earliest childhood from Judah's hills, that we have lost all memory of them. Think not that, though torn and separated so long from our kindred, we have forgotten them. No—believe me, Miriam, the memory of one's youth is like the soft and pliant wax, which easily takes the first impression, and, as time gradually hardens it against other impressions, retains the more tenaciously that which it first received. Clearly can I recall the days when our cousin Berith and I were wont as children to sport together in the vineyards of Beth-haccerem, and often I love to dwell again and again in thought on those happy hours. All since appears to be but a dream."—"Tell me, Rebecca," said Miriam, "how old wert thou when brought hither from Judea by the Babylonians?"—"Though but in my seventh year," replied Rebecca, "when snatched as a helpless orphan from the scenes and companions

of my childhood; yet if seventy times seven years had passed over me, Miriam, those scenes will still remain graven as with the point of a diamond on the tablets of my heart. Little as there is in these level plains to remind us of our own Carmel or of the snow-capped Lebanon, yet I see them still painted on the faithful mirror of memory's earliest and dearest associations. Fain would the citizens of yon proud city compare in scornful ridicule the waters of this Euphrates with Jordan's sacred stream. What though their fleets of rich merchandise are seen floating on its bosom? What though its waves in their courses wash the hundred brazen gates of the city of the Chaldeans? Yet where are the vine-clad hills and stately forests among which Jordan lies embosomed and overshadowed? Where are its time-honoured trophies —its pillar of stones, like to that at Gilgal, in memory of the days when Jordan heard the voice of the Most High, and like a guardian angel opened a passage to our fathers on dry land through his channel—yea, even through the midst of his harvest floods? When did Euphrates ever the like for the countless hosts of Assyria? As well might Jannes and Jambres, Egypt's far-famed magicians, have sought to compare their rods with that of our lawgiver Moses—as well, Miriam, might this huge heathen temple, raised to the honour of their idol Bel, be likened to the hallowed courts, and gates, and altars which deck the temple of the LORD JEHOVAH. But, alas!" said Rebecca, hastily stopping herself, "that holy temple! My memory is

here treacherous. Yet can it be that even now the mountain of the LORD'S house is overrun by the heathen and the spoiler, and that holy fabric laid low in the dust? Is it not a dream? Often have I in dreams and visions upon my bed wandered once again through the courts of Salem's sanctuary, and have awoke to find myself still a helpless prisoner in an enemy's land. Oh! may not these evil tidings be now but a dream?"

"Would GOD it were so," exclaimed Hadassah, "but these eyes are faithful witnesses, and their testimony is too true. Our GOD for our sins hath fulfilled His word, and has done unto His city and to His people, and to His 'holy and beautiful house,' 'as He did before unto His place which was in Shiloh.' But Miriam shall tell you all another day. We are still weak and wayworn with our toilsome journey, and our heart is heavy within us at the reproaches of our heathen neighbours. Show us now, Rebecca, the nearest path by which we may return to the spot where we left Deborah and her young companions. Rise, my daughter," said she to Miriam, who was still weeping on her bosom; "it is evening, and thy sisters will wonder why we tarry so long."

Deborah, whose faithful services to her beloved mistress had never ceased during the whole of the weary journey from Judea to Babylon, had now with her young charges, rejoined the little party, and they continued their way together sadly and silently towards the nearest of the city gates. With instinctive caution Hadassah and Miriam

wrapped closely round their faces the flowing and ample veils which formed their only head-dress. As it was now dusk they trusted that the shadows of evening which were now fast descending would help to conceal them from the notice, and so protect them from the insults of their scornful masters.

They had now approached within a few yards of the gateway, when one of the bystanders after carefully eyeing the little party came up to them and accosted Rebecca. Miriam in terror of some new indignity began to tremble like the aspen leaf at the first breath of the rising breeze. Her delicate frame overcome with recent fatigue, and her spirits depressed by a long succession of trials and hardships, yet keenly alive to the ingenuous feelings of shame, and especially for her mother's sake—she had noticed in an instant the approach of the stranger, and had quickly taken alarm. But Rebecca soon dispelled her fears, and with a smile of kind and affectionate sympathy whispered into the ears of those for whom it was intended, the welcome intelligence, which she had just received. It was a message from Talmon, bidding Hadassah quickly repair to the dwelling of one of the keepers of the royal prison—for that he had obtained after great endeavours, permission to hold a brief interview with her this evening.

They were indeed welcome tidings to Hadassah; but the very fact of their being so was another proof how great the change was which in a short time had taken place in her condition. She who was

once seldom out of Talmon's sight or society, had now to hail as an unexpected gratification, and to prize as a boon of no ordinary value the opportunity of spending an occasional and, as it were, stolen hour in the company of her husband. The swelling tide of calamity had of late beaten wave after wave against the frail fabric of her happiness. Her state was now not unlike that of some few hapless survivors clinging to the wreck of their stranded vessel: once they would have been alarmed at the mere drops of dewy spray falling on them—now they gladly bear the buffeting of the rudest billows, if but a ray of hope be left to cheer them.

During the journey from Judea to Babylon the comfort of the captives had naturally been but little studied; and if it had been attended to even in the case of others, there would have been but little chance of Talmon's receiving any such marks of favour. The Babylonians had been from the first commencement of the siege well informed by means of spies and deserters respecting the names and efforts of those who most strongly opposed the surrendering of Jerusalem to the besiegers; and Talmon's name had long been marked, together with those of his confederates, among the intended victims of signal vengeance. When the city was at length taken his life had only been spared at the earnest entreaty of Gedaliah, backed by the friendly though unmerited intercession of the prophet Jeremiah in his behalf. But in consequence of this lenity, indignities of other kinds were but the

more unsparingly heaped upon him. And if Hadassah was but seldom allowed to see or communicate with him, it was so far a mercy and a providential alleviation of her woes in that she was thus left less aware of his sufferings. Talmon's affection for the innocent partner of his troubles had increased in proportion to the consciousness, which now, alas! too late forced itself upon him, of his having been himself greatly the cause of such troubles to her. Accordingly when they did occasionally meet, he strove with all his power to soothe her grief by concealing his own hardships, and by convincing her more and more at each successive interview that his mind was returning to its former and better convictions. He no longer endeavoured to hide from her that his heart was at length bending in humble submission to the stroke which he had had so great a share in calling down upon his own head, and upon that of his family and country. This was the truest balm to Hadassah's wounded spirit, and it cheered her under many a weary hour of distress and trial.

On their arrival, however, at Babylon new causes of sorrow awaited her. The chief among the captive princes who had not been put to death by Nebuchadnezzar, were together with their late unhappy monarch led in triumph through the streets of the city, and after being exposed to the gaze and insults of the populace, were consigned for life to the public prisons. Here their former king Jehoiakim had for many years been confined; and here they were now sentenced to the slavish labours

of the mill or other menial occupations.* Hadassah's heart once more sank within her when first apprised of this death-blow to her domestic prospects; and it had naturally weighed most heavily on her spirits during the whole of the few days which had elapsed since their arrival at the city of their captivity. In the message however of this evening a faint ray of hope seemed to have burst forth; and it was hailed as gladly by Hadassah as the first pale streak of dawn is hailed by the weary sufferer on the sleepless bed of sickness. Hastily recommending the younger children to the care of Deborah and Miriam, she followed the messenger with quickened paces, heedless alike of the passengers who crossed her path, and of the new and strange scenes in the Assyrian capital through which her conductor now led her. A silent prayer ascending from her beating heart was heard by Him whose ear is ever open to the cry of the afflicted, and a tear might have been seen stealing down that cheek, now wan and pale, but which once rivalled that of the fairest among Judah's dark-eyed maidens.

A few moments more, and she was again in the arms of her husband. After some minutes, during which the feelings of each were too strong to allow them the free expression of their thoughts, Talmon began by reminding Hadassah how short a time was even now permitted them to continue together; and consequently how desirous he was of using it

* See Lamentations v. 13.

in hearing how it had fared with Miriam and his two younger daughters since their arrival in Babylon. "Tell me, my Hadassah," said he, "what treatment do our enemies show towards you? Surely even they will not insult and oppress such as you, the helpless, the weak, the friendless—alas! I might almost say, the widow and the fatherless—for though a husband how can I any longer aid or protect the wife of my bosom, or how can I be a father to those from whom I am thus cut off in the hour of their need? I could bear all else with patience, Hadassah; but this, to know thee to be in want, in distress, in danger—to be near thee and yet unable to succour, to comfort, or to shield thee and my children from the rude arm of the oppressor—all other trials are light by the side of this."

Talmon had detected the tear on Hadassah's cheek as she entered. He had noticed too, more distinctly than ever before, by reason of their longer separation, the change which trouble and the harassing fatigue of their recent journey had made in Hadassah's once happy and cheerful expression. The lines of care and grief had been making rapid advances; and the difference could hardly have failed to strike the eye even of a casual observer, much less the searching anxious gaze of an attached husband. "Woe, woe is me," cried Talmon. "Verily, O LORD, Thou dost write bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth. But Thou art righteous—for we have rebelled against Thee. Nevertheless, O LORD, hear me, and let Thy heavy hand of

wrath be laid, not on these the innocent victims of my folly, but on me. Preserve them, O LORD, and Thy servant shall bear with patience whatsoever it may be Thy gracious will to lay upon him."

"Nay, be it not so," cried Hadassah. "While thou sufferest, Talmon, it shall be my comfort to suffer with thee. Let GOD protect our children, and we will drink together the cup of His anger."

"That be far from thee, my Hadassah," replied Talmon in tones of increased earnestness. "Thou hast deserved far other treatment than he who is now allowed,—alas! how unworthily—to clasp thee once more to his bosom. The GOD of Israel protect thee, for thou hast honoured His name, while I sought to dishonour and profane it. Mine was the fault, Hadassah. It was I who reared against thy will the forbidden altar upon our housetop. It was I who burned incense thereon to the host of Heaven. Unto me therefore belongeth confusion of face. I gave my voice against the life of GOD's prophet. I turned a deaf ear to the pleadings of thy pious and compassionate heart in his behalf. Why was I so blind, so maddened by sinful passions as to listen to others rather than to thee? Alas! I dare not tell even to the wife of my bosom how these and other yet more bitter thoughts haunt me by day and by night. Verily my sin hath found me out. I saw it not before. It was unto me as the angel who stood with drawn sword to stop the way of the prophet Balaam; other eyes could see it, mine could not. But now it is no longer hidden from me, and humbly I bow myself

before my GOD for my rebellion. May it be His gracious will to treat thee and our little ones, in this land of our captivity better than I treated Him in the days when He yet lifted up the light of His countenance upon me."

The keeper of the prison, though evidently touched by their sorrow and distress, now reminded them to their surprise that he had already allowed a longer interview than he had promised—but still he held out a hope that possibly future opportunities might be permitted for their meeting. Accordingly after a few other mutual inquiries they once more parted; and, though amid tears and sorrow, yet with hearts more lightened and relieved than on many occasions of parting before, because mutually conscious of being now more resigned and conformed to GOD'S will than formerly.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Few there are of so weak capacity but public evils they easily espy; fewer so patient as not to complain when the grievous inconveniences thereof work sensible smart. Howbeit to see wherein the harm which they feel consisteth, the seeds from which it sprang, and the method of curing it, belongeth to a skill, the study whereof is full of toil and the practice beset with difficulties. * * * And whereas we read of many so much commended, some for their mild and merciful disposition, some for their virtuous severity, some for integrity of life, all these were the fruits of true and infallible principles delivered unto us in the word of GOD, as the axioms of our religion. * * * Without all controversy the purer and perfecter our religion is, the worthier effects it hath in them who stedfastly and sincerely embrace it. * * * Seeing therefore it doth thus appear that the safety of all estates dependeth upon religion; and that religion unfeignedly loved perfecteth men's abilities unto all kinds of virtuous services in the commonwealth, we have reason to think that all true virtues are to honour true religion as their parent, and all well ordered commonwealths to love her as their chiefest stay."—HOOKER. *Eccl. Pol.* Book V.

CHAPTER XXI.

"Caught from that blaze by wrath Divine,
Lost branches of the once-loved vine,
Now withered, spent, and sere,
See Israel's sons, like glowing brands,
Tossed wildly o'er a thousand lands
For twice a thousand year.

God will not quench nor slay them quite,
But lifts them like a beacon light
The apostate Church to scare;
Or like pale ghosts that darkling roam,
Hovering around their ancient home,
But find no refuge there.
* * * *
Gentiles, with fixed yet awful eye,
Turn ye this page of mystery,
Nor slight the warning sound.
'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet;
The place where man his God shall meet
Be sure is holy ground.'"

Christian Year. Fifth Sunday in Lent.

It was about a month later when, on a spot by the river side, similar to that before describe nearly the same little group were again sitting together. Such indeed was now their frequent cus-

tom, after the heat of the day was over, and when their daily task of homely labour had been completed. Compared with their looks on the former occasion, sorrow, though perhaps it had assumed a more settled and habitual appearance, was evidently much soothed and calmed. The air of meek resignation which was visible in the features of more than one of them, seemed to speak of struggles severe but past—of hearts humbly prepared to meet what might yet be in store for them; and though only too grateful for any further alleviation of their troubles that might be in mercy vouchsafed, yet with but a faint hope of such being the case.

Hadassah's circumstances, coupled with her pious and gentle temper, had of late been such as to bring her to a state of mind very much resembling that which such indications appeared to imply. Though in public there was still great indignation among the Babylonians against their Jewish captives—although, as might have been expected from an incensed and arbitrary monarch like Nebuchadnezzar, there were many indignities offered and frequent acts of severity practised upon them—yet individual instances were here and there found of great compassion and sympathy. Such was the case with the keeper of the public prison in which Talmon was confined. He gave by degrees more and more liberty to Talmon. Few days passed in which Hadassah did not for a short time at least enjoy his society; and more than once she had been allowed to bring with her Miriam and the

younger children to receive again a father's embrace.

Hadassah was thus becoming more and more reconciled to her lot, and could view with some degree of resignation her present condition, humble indeed as it was compared with that to which she had been in former years accustomed. Miriam too was beginning to regain her spirits, as she saw in her mother's looks less sorrow and dejection. Finding her accordingly in a more cheerful and comfortable frame of mind, her young companions ventured once more to remind her of her promise that she would give them some personal account of the siege of their beloved city and of her subsequent sufferings on the journey.

"We have already told you," said Rebecca, "with what feelings we beheld the collected forces of the Babylonians march from hence, knowing as we did their cruel intentions against our country; but, alas! we little thought what misery they would be permitted to inflict upon her." Miriam having no longer any excuse for delay, began her task; and though, as she proceeded, it cost her many a sigh, especially as she related the sudden death of her brother Zabad—yet she persevered. The particulars of the first commencement of the siege—the retreat of the Babylonian army on the approach of the Egyptians—the hopes thus raised, and their speedy disappointment—all these points she dwelt on with the freshness which recent experience alone could impart. "And now, Rebecca," she continued, "how shall I describe the events of

that fearful night? Throughout the preceding day the shouting on the ramparts, the clashing of weapons in close conflict, and all the confused noise of battle, had been louder than usual. Hourly were we in terror for my dear father's safety. He had been absent from us longer by many hours than ever before; and each hurried message we received from him seemed more full of alarm and danger than those which had preceded it. Tidings were at length brought that after much bloodshed the besiegers had taken the outer wall. Many had fallen in defending it, but many more, as the famine had grown daily more general and more severe, had been unable through exhaustion to continue at their post on the battlements.

"The whole of the lower city was now in the power of our enemies, who hastened to revenge themselves on their helpless prisoners for our long resistance. The famine, however, had already slain its thousands; and even the fierce besiegers stood appalled in the midst of their victorious career at entering into houses and finding whole families lying together dead from starvation. We knew not ourselves till then the full degree of the horrors with which we were surrounded. About dusk as our fears on the approach of night were beginning to be redoubled, Deborah reached our dwelling. Her features were still ghastly with horror at the scenes from which she had just escaped; her aged limbs tottered from the effects of fatigue and faintness. In this condition she came to beg a refuge in the house of which she had so often

been a welcome inmate. We gladly received her, and bade her quickly to relate what tidings she brought with her. Her sad tale was related in a few brief words. When the enemy had effected their entrance into the city they speedily dispersed themselves for the work of plunder and slaughter. To rush into the streets and meet the foe was but to seek death at the point of the sword. To hide themselves in the inner chambers or whatever other lurking places could be found was now the only resource of the wretched survivors. Deborah, with her kinswomen Hatipha and Rizpah, as well as many others had so done; but in vain. The enemy had burst in upon their retreat, had slain indiscriminately mother and child—the infant and the sire of hoary hairs—reserving only some few of Hatipha's age to bemoan their sad destiny, and to envy even the violent death which had overtaken their relatives. Stunned and stupified, Deborah had fallen in the confusion among the dying and the dead of her kindred; and she recovered only to find herself weltering in a pool of their blood. Quitting, as soon as she dared, this heart-rending scene, she ventured under the favour of darkness to approach one of the gates of the upper city, and there with some few others, the wretched survivors of that day's slaughter, she gained admittance.

"In this state it was that she made her way to us—her raiment stained in various parts with the life-blood of her dearest friends—her features, usually so calm and staid, now disturbed and

ghastly with terror. Sad was the omen, which we drew for ourselves from such a specimen of the treatment which our enemies designed for their victims. Still my father came not home to us; and worse fears soon began to suggest themselves. No certain tidings could be gained. All without seemed tumult and confusion. Contrary reports from time to time reached us—some, that we had no reason to fear, for the inner wall was still secure against all the attempts of the besiegers; and that the princes would defend it as their last refuge. Some reports stated that the king was preparing to fly secretly under cover of night, and that all was to be abandoned. Crowds were hurrying by, passing and repassing incessantly. Every open place near our dwelling, as well as the very courts of the temple were now filled with the multitudes who had fled at the first alarm from the lower to the upper city. Their cries and lamentations, for the slain as well as for their own bitter miseries, were heard far and near. We could scarcely allow ourselves to think of our own troubles while thus surrounded with suffering so greatly for the present exceeding ours in severity. Yet a moment's further thought suggested how soon might our lot be like theirs.

"Thus in an agony of anxiety and alarm the first and second watches of the night were spent. Every hour seemed to be tenfold longer than usual. Sleep was as much a stranger to our eyes as peace and security to our minds. Scarcely could my mother's fondest caresses and persuasions soothe

or quiet my younger sisters. Her unwonted looks and manner spoke so plainly, even to them, that no words could counteract the effect; and they, without knowing like ourselves how much cause there was for fear, became as frightened as we were. Much had we endured, as we vainly thought, for many months past; but all that had preceded seemed now to have been happiness itself compared with this night of terrors. Shortly before daybreak steps were heard approaching the chamber in which we had spent those weary hours of darkness and dismay. It was, as we fervently hoped and prayed, my father himself—and never did the wayworn traveller, who had laid himself down to perish in the desert, more gladly hail the sight of approaching friends, than we then welcomed the appearance of him who was our natural guardian and protector. But alas! we soon learnt that protection was now beyond his power to afford us. Already was our city deserted by her king and her princes. Having availed himself of a private and almost unknown gate, which led to the royal gardens, on the side of the city least watched by the besiegers, the king had secretly fled during the night. The enemy were accordingly now left in undisturbed possession of the gates which opened from the lower to the upper city. The sun arose only to behold the carnage and atrocities of the preceding day repeated with aggravated cruelty. The streets flowed with blood. To fly was impossible; for every outlet from the city was now seized and guarded by the Babylonian troops; and

their horsemen were already in pursuit of those who had escaped by night. We waited in silent despair, like victims before the altar, till it should be our turn to suffer. My father still arrayed in his armour, as he had lately come from the battlements, remained fixed and motionless near the gateway, prepared to defend his home with his life against the first tide of the assailants. But how can words, Rebecca, describe those fearful moments? If the days of my life could be prolonged to ages instead of years, never would the recollection of that night or that morning be blotted from the tablets of my mind.

"But GOD is merciful. In our deep distress He heard our prayers, and in the hour of our greatest need, sent us help unexpected as it was undeserved. Suddenly the heavy tread of many persons hastily advancing across the court of our dwelling was heard, accompanied by the iron clank of armour, the accents of a foreign tongue, and the confused noise of numerous followers. My mother in an instant threw her arms around us, and with a shriek of despair fell senseless to the ground. Her fears were but too well grounded. The captains of the Babylonian host were on our threshold; but by the side of the foremost of them we gladly recognised the well known countenance of my uncle Gedaliah, and still more to our astonishment that of the prophet Jeremiah. How such unforeseen and providential means of rescue could have been raised up for us, we were at the moment altogether at a loss to know; but we found after-

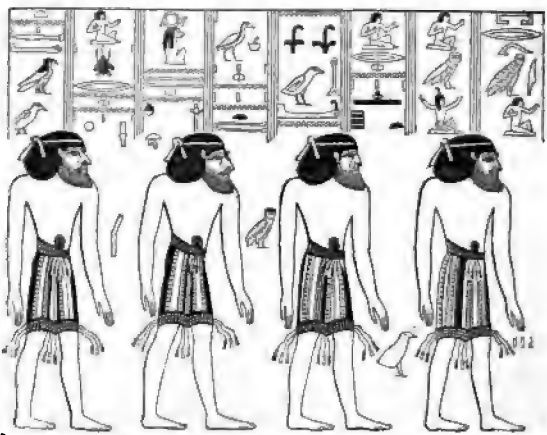
wards that on entering the upper city, the chiefs of the Babylonians had gone direct to the royal palace in quest of the king. They had then searched the state-prison, which was hard by the palace, and there they had found the prophet together with Gedaliah, who had lately joined him there. As particular orders had been left by the king of Babylon for the safety of the prophet and for his honourable treatment, he became at once a person of influence with them, and at Gedaliah's kind and thoughtful request he interceded in my father's behalf. Thus were we for the moment rescued from the very jaws of destruction.

"But alas! my father's name was too well known among our enemies to allow of his expecting favour at their hands. His life, if even that were ultimately spared, was the utmost that we could venture to hope for in remission of the sentence already pronounced against the princes. A few days more saw us departing as captives from our native city—driven from the home of our fathers—a wretched band—a mere straggling remnant of the thousands of Judah. The sons of the king and the families of the princes, formed one party. My father with the other princes, and with our unhappy king made the second; for they had all been quickly overtaken in their flight by the enemy's horsemen and their Edomite allies.* Stripped of all their armour and accoutrements, barefooted†—

* See Obadiah, v. 14.

† See Isaiah xx. 4, Deut. xxviii., &c., Harmer's Observations, 157.

with nought on their heads save the tire that bound their hair—only a single garment wrapped about their loins—and their hands ignominiously bound in fetters, it was thus that the nobles of Judah departed in company with their fallen monarch amid the insults and jeers of their Babylonian guards.



"Our road lay through Samaria and Galilee to the north, towards Riblah where the king of Babylon was then tarrying. We thus left the city by the gate of Ephraim, passing through the quarter of Acra. But how was all here changed, Rebecca, since I had last seen it. I remembered it alive and busy with the various occupations of the mechanic and artisan, receiving or sending forth

from its stores the rich wares of the merchant, its squares and markets filled with the dealers in fruit and herbs, resounding with the merry noise of the children at their sports or in their songs, the aged and hoary sires sitting tranquilly together and conversing in the gateway—alas! now all was different, houses deserted and pillaged, their wretched owners lying dead upon the ground before their own doors and porches as the famine or the less lingering fate by the sword of the conquerors had severally left them, their surviving friends and relatives already driven like ourselves to degradation and slavery—the houses of the more wealthy filled with the victorious troops of the besiegers who were still revelling like vultures in the work of spoil, of outrage and of destruction. Around one dwelling in particular there appeared to be a greater crowd assembled than elsewhere. We inquired and found that it was the house of Jozapah the well-known usurer. Multitudes had been attracted thither by the repute of his enormous hoards, which they were compelling him by torments and cruelties to discover to them.

"As we drew nearer to the city gate the scene of desolation and horror grew, if possible, yet more appalling. Here it was that the frequent skirmishes and affrays had taken place between our troops and the besiegers. Here the neighbouring houses had been demolished to repair the injuries done to the city walls by the engines of war. Here too had been the place of execution for the deserters whom our troops had recaptured in their

excursions; and still hanging over the gateway were various savage trophies of slaughtered foes who had been slain in the sallies made from time to time by our soldiery. But will you not, Rebecca, think me almost deserving of having been obliged to witness such scenes for thus minutely relating them to you—nay for even dwelling on them in my thoughts? Would GOD, they were less deeply engraven on my memory."

"Nay," said Rebecca, "I shall but learn from these sad details to sympathise the more truly with thy grief, Miriam; I shall feel more deeply the mercy of our GOD in delivering me from such evil days. I shall see ground for humbly repenting of those murmurings in which I fear I have too often indulged when from the land of our captivity I thought of those who were still enjoying the sweets of liberty in our own native country. How little did I foresee for what they were reserved. And shall I not from this day, Miriam, be more fully convinced what are the bitter fruits of a nation's sins? Would that we had all seen and known this truth sooner! But tell us yet, Miriam, what befell thee by the way."

"As we left the city," continued Miriam, "and found ourselves at length without its walls, how many familiar objects again attracted our notice, objects which for so many months past we had lost sight of, and which now were viewed with redoubled interest, as it was probably the last time we might ever be allowed to behold them. But it was no time for meditation or reflection. Even the few

hasty looks which we ventured to cast back upon our beloved city before we began to wind among the hills that were about to shut it for ever from our view, were but a signal for fresh ridicule or insults upon its sacred name. In silence therefore we advanced hurriedly onwards, being barely allowed time to halt during the heat of the mid-day sun; for it was the command of the king of Babylon to bring the chief captives with all speed to him at Riblah. By my uncle Gedaliah's kind foresight a camel had been procured for my mother's use on the journey and the faithful Deborah was allowed to accompany us. Had it not been for this thoughtful care of my uncle in our behalf, it could hardly have failed to happen that some of our little party, either my mother, myself, or my younger sisters must have sunk like many others through weariness and faintness by the way. As we passed through the various towns of Samaria and Galilee where the Babylonians had either left garrisons or formed stations during the siege of our city, new trials and hardships awaited us. The malice and mockings of fresh persecutors had each day to be endured. Their women made songs upon our king, and embittered his sad lot of humiliation and suffering by open ridicule and reproach.* And as our company was daily diminished in number by fresh cases of death through fatigue, sickness, or cruel treatment, so the weight of present sorrow, and the melancholy prospect of the

* See Harmer's Observations, 173.

future seemed to press the more heavily upon the unhappy survivors.

"But with many of us this season of misery and trial was fast drawing to a sudden and bitter close. A few days' journey after we had passed through Galilee brought us to Riblah, in Syria, where the king of Babylon was awaiting our arrival. And here it was the will of the Most High to manifest to us another proof of that Divine foreknowledge, the decrees of which, ere they had yet been irrevocably sealed, had been so often in mercy held up to our misguided king for his direction, but which he had so wilfully persisted in mistrusting. Oh! that it had been otherwise! Then how many might have been alive and in peace unto this hour, whose 'sun has set while it was yet day!'

"It had long been foretold, Rebecca, by the prophet Ezekiel, whom GOD has raised up from among our brethren in this land of our captivity, that our king Zedekiah should not see Babylon; and this having come to the king's ears, he would no longer give heed to the warnings of the prophet Jeremiah, who declared that he should certainly be carried away prisoner to the country of the Chaldeans. But how surely were the words of the LORD, which He spake by both His servants, the prophets, to be now fulfilled. Having summoned our fallen and captive monarch before his judgment seat at Riblah, the king of Babylon first loade him with the bitterest reproaches for the breach of his oath and covenant, and then proceeded, not, as we expected, to give orders for his immediate death, but, as

though checked and overruled by some impulse from above, unconscious as he was of the existence of any Divine prophecy relating to this matter, to issue such commands as caused its complete accomplishment. The youthful sons of Judah's king, who should in their turn have sat on the throne of their father, were at once slain before that father's sight; and, as though it were intended that the dreadful scene should never be dispelled from the memory of the wretched parent, or weakened by the view of any subsequent objects, the eyes of the king were immediately torn from their sockets. Thus blind, helpless, a prisoner, and in fetters, the unhappy Zedekiah was dragged hither together with ourselves, to linger out the remnant of his days in the dungeons of this haughty city. Oh! what must now be his thoughts, Rebecca? May the LORD look down upon him with pity, and grant him to drink of the cup of consolation in the evening of his days. But ask me no more, Rebecca. Suffice it for thee to know that Seraiah, the high-priest, and the other nobles, his companions, perished at the same time by the sword, in the presence of the king of Babylon. The prophet's kind intercession in my father's behalf was remembered, and once more prevailed; and by the mercy of the Most High he is yet spared to us. May the LORD still be merciful to him, and in His own good time give him deliverance from the bondage and oppression of the prison-house. And then, my mother," said Miriam, turning to Hadassah, "we will again dwell together as one household, and thou, even

thou, my mother, shalt find comfort again, and shalt have one to shield and protect thee from wanton insult; and our GOD will make us a home again in this land of our captivity."

CHAPTER XXII.

"O come hither and behold the works of the LORD, what destruction He hath brought upon the earth. Be still then, and know that I am GOD. I will be exalted in the heathen—I will be exalted in the earth."—*Ps.* xlvi.

CHAPTER XXII.

"The sun full seventy times had passed the realm
Of burning Scorpius, and was hastening down
The steep convex of heaven, since Babylon
Received her mourning prisoners. Savage taunts,
And the rude insults of their barbarous lords
Embitter all their woe. Meanwhile the law
Proclaimed on Horeb's top neglected lies.
Nor kid nor evening lamb, nor heifer bleeds,
Nor incense smokes—nor holy Levite claims
Choice fruits and rich oblations. On the trees
That o'er the waters bend, their untuned harps—
Harps which their fathers struck to festal hymns,
Hang useless.

* * * *

Driven
In early childhood to a stranger's land,
Or born sad heirs of slavery, still they cast
An anxious look from Perath's willowy vale
Towards Jordan's sacred stream; and, when the sun
Sunk in the west, with eager eye pursued
His parting beams, and pointed to the place
Where from their sight the faint horizon hid
Those hills which round deserted Salem's walls
Stood like a bulwark. And as some tired hart,
Driven by keen hunters o'er the champaign wild,
Pants for the running brook—so long the tribes

Of captive Judah for their native clime,
Again to sing the strains of Jesse's son,
Again to raise a temple to their GOD."

ROBERTS'S *Judah Restored.*

THE school of adversity is a rigorous one and hard to bear; yet never is it found to be more necessary or more beneficial in its effects than when so ordered by a wise and gracious Providence as to prepare us by degrees for blows each in succession more heavy and severe than its predecessor. The shock, that would otherwise have stunned or even crushed its victim, becomes by such gradual discipline capable of being borne with comparative patience. Trials and struggles are to the mind what storms in the natural world are to the young and growing tree. The sudden blast may shake and loosen it for the time; but by those very means it is becoming more and more deeply rooted till it can defy the tempest. Such trials, we may be assured, are sent in mercy, for "the ALMIGHTY doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." They are sent either gradually to inure the guilty for bearing the whole amount of correction intended to be here inflicted, or to warn them, till by increased severity they are turned from the evil of their ways.

It may be that the sufferings in which we are involved are the fruits not so much of our own guilt as of that of others. Still we must not complain. For though not personally partakers in such guilt, yet perhaps we have not been ready to counteract it where we could—or even if able to claim exemption on this score, we may, notwith-

standing, as members of a body, have enjoyed in some way the advantages resulting from others' virtues; and now by the same rule must be prepared to share in the common consequence of others' faults. Individual suffering, as necessarily implied in a nation's punishment, must be thus regarded. Nor is such a view in any degree inconsistent with the general principle of retributive justice.

The storm of adversity had now long darkened the whole atmosphere of Hadassah's earthly prospects, but its fury was not yet spent. Little, however, as she foresaw what still awaited her, yet recent circumstances had made her far better prepared to meet it. Though sometimes, when she allowed herself to look back a few years into the past, she could hardly realise to her mind what had happened, yet those years had not gone by without producing their due effect. Occasionally indeed during the silence and darkness of the night, when outward objects had vanished from her sight, and the powers of imagination were left more free to obey the dictates of the fancy or the inclination, she would indulge in recollections and reveries of the past, until it was with difficulty that she could persuade herself of the reality of her present altered lot: and each occasion of awakening again to the painful truth seemed almost like a fresh and additional trial of her fortitude. In her very dreams scenes of the past would often haunt her. Only a few years since, and she had been surrounded by all the luxuries which wealth could purchase or rank confer—dwelling in the midst of those com-

forts which only home can supply—free from fears or anxieties for the future—all appearing as bright and promising in the distance as the present was cheering and gladsome—her many friends, and kindred, and relatives forming as it were circle within circle to shield her from any unforeseen blow or misfortune, or at least to share it with her if it came—her children growing up around her like the branches of the fruitful olive, reflecting in their youthful features, as she hourly gazed upon them with renewed delight, the manly countenance of him who was their and her protector, whose heart and every wish of it was then one with hers, and who daily joined with her in bearing the light and easy burthen, as it had hitherto proved, of parental care and solicitude.

She was dwelling in her own country and among her own people, in the land of her fathers, where they for many generations had dwelt before, and where their bones had been peaceably laid in the sepulchres of their forefathers. Her recollections from tenderest childhood were naturally associated with the scenes so early familiarised to her eyes, with the gates and streets, the bulwarks and battlements of Jerusalem, "the holy city," "the city of the great king," "the joy of the whole earth." Her home from infancy had been beneath the shadow of the temple of the Most High; and His sacred courts, as they had received her when borne a helpless infant, to be presented unto the LORD, so they had continued long to witness the service and worship of her willing and pious heart in her riper

years. She now remembered in her captivity those precious days; and never till then had they appeared so precious to her. What would she not now have given could she have recalled but one brief hour of them! But alas! how great was now the contrast! She had wept as a mother for her only son, who had been suddenly snatched from her by a violent death; she had seen kindred, relatives, and dearest friends fall by the sword of a foreign foe—she had witnessed the sepulchres of her fathers dishonoured and laid waste; the city of her people beleaguered and reduced to ruins; the husband of her youth bound in fetters, and after a narrow escape from the sword of the conqueror, yet doomed to perpetual slavery; the temple of her God rifled and profaned by unholy hands; and herself, already almost a widow, now left alone at the mercy of strangers, with no other arm than her own to protect her helpless children in the land of their captivity.

Such sad reflections she could not always banish from her mind; and as she thought on them the cup of bitterness seemed well nigh full. Little did her worst fears forewarn her that the last and bitterest drop of all was yet to be added.

They had returned, as usual, at nightfall to their humble dwelling in Babylon on the evening of the day on which Miriam had recited to her companions the incidents of the siege, and the hardships of their subsequent journey from Judea to Riblah, and thence to Assyria. During their absence a stranger had come in search of them, but not

finding them, had desired it to be reported to them by some neighbours that he had lately arrived with tidings from Judea, and that he was the bearer of certain messages to them—but that, as they were not then present to hear his words, he would leave the letters which had been committed to his care for them, and would come to them again on the morrow. They found accordingly two small rolls of parchment, each carefully wrapped in a linen covering, with Miriam's name neatly written on the outside. One of the two was somewhat smaller than the other, and it appeared to have been rather hastily wrapped and sealed when compared with the larger one. While Hadassah held the smaller one in her hand, Miriam having readily gained her mother's consent, proceeded to open the larger of the two rolls, and having taken off the outer wrapper, she exclaimed with a burst of joy, "It is as I said, my mother; it is Berith's seal and Berith's writing. She has been faithful to her promise, and has not forgotten her absent and exiled kindred. But listen to me, my mother, while I now read what tidings my cousin sends us of herself, and of my uncle, and of our beloved country."—"Read, my daughter," said Hadassah, "and GOD grant they may be tidings of good and not of evil." Miriam accordingly commenced reading from the larger roll.

"From Berith to her beloved cousin Miriam, health and blessing and greeting. Though it is but seldom that my dearest Miriam has been absent from her cousin's thoughts since the bitter

moment of our last sad parting, yet till now I have found no hand to be the bearer of this word of comfort and of sympathy from me to my lost friends in the land of their captivity. That parting hour, Miriam! How often have I lived it over again, each word and look and thought connected with it. Can it be so many weeks since I saw my beloved Miriam with her father and mother and sisters torn from that home where I had so lately known them in peace, in security and happiness? And how has my heart traced and followed from day to day and from town to town, along their weary journey, that band of Judah's captive children with whom I saw thee, Miriam, and others of my kindred joined at thy departure from our city. How has it fared with thee since? Send me tidings quickly, Miriam, and say how our conquerors have treated thee in their own city and country. Has the GOD of our fathers given thee favour in their sights? Has He heard the prayer which my father and all our household have daily offered in behalf of our exiled brethren, and has He been merciful unto them?

"Truly His visitations have been just upon our people and upon our country, for we have sinned against Him—but at our humble petition will He not turn again and look upon us, and in the midst of judgment remember mercy? Our hope is that it hath been so with all of you, our dear kindred and fellow-countrymen; and that we may yet learn that He hath healed again the bones which he hath broken and that He may make us once more

to hear of joy and gladness. And now how shall I tell thee, Miriam, what the LORD hath brought to pass since thine eyes last beheld our sacred city and the temple of the LORD JEHOVAH? Oh think not that we who have been spared from wearing the captive's chains have yet escaped sights and scenes as bitter as those which ye have witnessed who have been carried to a foreign and distant land. They saw but the beginning of the woes which have befallen our devoted city. For many days after your departure the spoilers continued insatiate in their work of plunder and destruction. With the Babylonians were joined the ancient and implacable foes of our race, the sons of Edom. Amid revelry and riot, no pity, no distinction was shown between profane things and holy; rather no occasion was lost of throwing scorn and contempt upon whatever we had held most sacred. "Down with it, down with it, even to the ground," was the infuriate cry of the Edomite at any signs of respect or remorse that betrayed themselves in the breasts of their brother spoilers. The houses of the people as well as the city gates with the seats and council-chambers of the Elders had been already given up to the flames; and the same lot now befell the dwellings of the nobles and princes after they had been ransacked by successive parties. In every direction the work of havoc and ruin was fast spreading. Day after day some part of their troops laboured under the direction of their captains with engines of war both from within and from without in demolishing the towers and bul-

warks and battlements which had so long defended us from their assaults. One only spot was yet unharmed; and while that remained so, there was still enough to cheer us, and my father bade us not lament for the rest. The temple of the LORD was yet unhurt. Its sacred courts though profaned by the steps of the heathen and the uncircumcised, were still entire, and its gates and pinnacles still stood erect and lifted up their heads towards heaven as before time. Daily our prayers were offered to Almighty GOD that He would spare His holy and beautiful house; and trusting for awhile that our prayers would avail, we continued to linger around its precincts in trembling hope. But all was in vain. When the Babylonian captain Nebuzaradan had made all the necessary preparations, he proceeded to strip those sacred walls of all their remaining treasures and ornaments. The holy vessels, the altars, the brazen sea which our king Solomon had caused to be made with all the skill of the Tyrian workmen—the very gates and bases he broke up and carried away in fragments. The two stately pillars of the porch with the wreathen work and pomegranates and chains of their lofty chapiters, he cast down from their pedestals and destroyed, till no remnant was left to show their once fair and goodly proportions. Upon every vessel of gold or silver pertaining to the sanctuary, upon the bowls, the censers and the candlesticks, the hands of the relentless spoiler were laid. It was in vain that at every stage of their work the voice of earnest entreaty and inter-

cession was addressed to them by some of the few aged priests who had hitherto escaped their pursuit and lain concealed in some lurking place of the temple, but who now came forth to prevent, if it were possible, with their dying breath the desecration of the holy edifice. Their appearance was but the signal for fresh insult and scorn towards the GOD of our fathers, and of additional cruelty and bloodshed among His servants. Stripped of their sacred vestments by some reckless hand among the soldiery, and dragged by the hair of their heads along those very courts where they had for so many years served in their course before their GOD, they lay wounded and helpless like the shattered fragments and ruins that were scattered thickly around them. Among them, conspicuous and remarkable for his hoary head and venerable mien, as well as for his earnest and persevering entreaties that they would at least spare the most holy place, was seen the aged Buzi. Though again and again repulsed with ridicule and threats, and at length with blows, he ceased not to intercede with all the energies and eloquence that his enfeebled frame could command. But alas! Miriam, my hand trembles and my heart is sick within me, while I tell thee what the LORD permitted to befall His devoted and faithful servant. While bent on his tottering knees on the steps which led up from the inner court to the sanctuary, with hands outstretched imploringly towards the plunderers—mingling from time to time with his entreaties to them supplications also to the GOD of heaven, suddenly one of the two lofty

brazen pillars of the porch yielded to the blows and efforts of the destroyers, and in its course falling directly on him crushed his aged limbs to atoms.

"It grieves me, Miriam, to think how thy mother will lament over these sad tidings of woe. Well I wot how great respect she had for all my father's friends; and chief among them for the pious Buzi, the guide and instructor of her early years. Verily our lot is cast upon evil times, when our aged sires thus perish by a violent death, instead of being, like the ripe shock of corn, when full of years and honours, gathered in peace unto their fathers.

"The Babylonian had now done well nigh all that his hand could find to do; and we even still dared to hope that he would suffer the walls of the LORD'S temple, stripped and profaned as they had been, to continue standing, if but as a monument of its former beauty. Again, however, we were disappointed. The very wreck of all which we had so much honoured, and valued, and reverenced was not to be our own. No sooner had the work of plunder ceased than all which remained was given up to the consuming flames. Even there, there where the fire that came down from heaven had so often burnt in the sacrificial rites of our religion, where the wreathing volumes of smoke from the altar of the LORD had been seen ascending towards the dwelling of the Most High, in honour of His name and in obedience to His own holy ordinance, there now was beheld the angry torrent of flame bursting furiously forth and spreading rapidly from gate to gate, from pinnacle to pinnacle,

while our foes looked on with triumphant exultation. For days and nights the flames continued to break out, now in one portion of the holy edifice, now in another, as they successively found fresh fuel to feed them in the cedar roofs and beams which adorned the sanctuary and its chambers. Fearful and appalling was the sight during the darkness of night. The neighbouring hills, reflecting the lurid glare, seemed lighted up purposely to look on in gloomy grandeur upon the scene of devastation. Upon the lower city, now utterly deserted and in ruins, sparks and burning fragments were descending in continued showers, while anon, as a fiercer burst of flame arose, every well-known street and square, every shattered tower and gateway, with the remains of their blackened and crumbling walls, became painfully distinct and visible in all the nakedness of desolation.

"For one short hour, Miriam, I ventured thus to gaze from Olivet on the last scene of devastation which closed over our devoted city. Vain were the attempt to describe the feelings which crowded upon my mind. No tongue could utter them. My father and myself stood together, lost in mute and speechless astonishment. At length, instinctively as it were, we turned away together, and retraced our steps over the mountain towards Bethany. As we pursued our way slowly down the steep and winding path, the moonbeams fell palely but clearly on the distant surface of that bitter lake, where once the wealthy inhabitants of Go-

THE FLIGHT FROM SODOM.

SEE PAGE 210.

morrah dwelt. By a sudden turn of the road we found ourselves directly facing it. Our eyes could not avoid the view. And oh! why, Miriam, should I conceal from thee the thoughts which involuntarily forced themselves upon me at that solemn hour? Though momentary, yet how painfully full of humiliating associations was that single glance. Seemed it not like the finger of GOD pointing thither and saying, 'Daughter of Judah, there was thy warning—why didst not thou heed it, ere yet the cup of wrath was full to overflowing?' Neither my father nor I spake, but the comparison, which our lips forebore to express, our hearts dared not refuse to admit."

"I have now told thee all, Miriam; and surely when thou readest thou wilt have cause to say that sights and scenes more sad have not met the eyes even of Judah's captives at Babylon. Think then of us as we do of you, with pity and kindly sympathy; but this, I know, thou and thy mother will do. My father has now fixed his dwelling at Mizpeh, where a few others of the poorest of the people, whom the general, Nebuzaradan, has left as a remnant, are assembled under my father's direction. The prophet Jeremiah is oftentimes among us; but more often, they say, he is seen mourning alone over the deserted ruins of our beloved city.* Thither

* "To the north of the town, and not very far from the walls, is the magnificent cavern called that of the prophet Jeremiah. Here it is said he retired to pour forth his lamentations. As far as size, gloominess, and grandeur go, it well merits its appellation. * * * No spot could have been more suitable to

he retires to some solitary spot, as we hear, near where once stood the gate of Ephraim, to lament over the bitter consequences of those sins which for so many years he in vain endeavoured to check. Scarce another human step is now to be heard among the ruins of our once joyous city. The wild foxes have made their dwelling there, and roam unmolested over the heights of Zion and in the very courts of what was once the sanctuary of the LORD JEHOVAH.

"Farewell, my beloved cousin—may our GOD yet turn and look upon us, and of His mercy grant us better times. Send me word speedily of thine own health, and how it fares with all my dear friends in the land of their enemies. Farewell."

With breathless interest had both mother and daughter listened to the contents of Berith's affectionate but sorrowful epistle; and warmly did they sympathise, even in their own humble condition, with the feelings which, even if she had not endeavoured to describe them, they were aware that she must have experienced. Their next thought was how to get the letter conveyed with as little delay as possible to Talmon. To him also they knew it would be, as it had been to themselves, a source of melancholy pleasure thus to hear what had of late befallen his kinsmen and the city of his fathers.

the utterance of the woes against the devoted city, and the mournful and impassioned feelings of the inspired prophet."—CARNE'S *Letters from the East*, Vol. I. p. 327. See also *Univ. Hist.* Book i. c. 7, p. 589.

Though it was already past eventide, Hadassah could not consent to defer till the morrow the occasion which she thought was now in her power of breaking and relieving the monotony of her husband's prison solitude. Accordingly, having procured the company and assistance of a neighbour who dwelt near, they proceeded together towards the well known spot whither Hadassah's steps had so often of late anxiously borne her. Having arrived and made inquiry for Talmon, begging permission either to be allowed to see him, or at least to have the letter conveyed to him, they were not a little surprised at finding that he had that very evening for the first time, gained private leave from the keeper of the prison to be absent for a few hours, and to visit his family. Hadassah, though rejoiced at the intelligence, was unprepared for it at the moment; for though she knew that Talmon had of late cherished such a hope in consequence of the great confidence which the keeper of the prison reposed in him, yet she hardly expected it to have taken place without more notice having been given to her by Talmon.

With fervent expressions of thankfulness she now hurried back to her humble home, relying on finding Talmon there ready to receive her. Great was her disappointment when she neither found him, as she had expected, nor could hear any tidings of his having been near their dwelling. In painful suspense she continued to wait, perplexed and anxious, at his still not appearing. Again and again she put the same questions to Miriam, and

more than once resolved to retrace her steps back to the prison. It then suddenly occurred to her for the first time that by the way she had overheard in the passing conversation of the citizens on that evening, louder threats and imprecations against their captives than of late they had been in the habit of using. Vague accounts of some fresh offence on their part seemed to be in men's mouths; and though, while in her hurry to accomplish the object of her walk, these sounds and expressions had fallen almost unnoticed on her ears, yet now, when she had time to reflect, and was searching anxiously in her mind how to account for Talmon's absence, such broken fragments of conversation were remembered, and many a subject of terror began to rise up inwardly to her view. It struck her, too, almost at the same moment that she had found Miriam very different in spirits and in manner on her return from the prison from what she had been when she left her. Then suddenly there flashed across her memory the second and smaller of the two letters which the stranger had brought, and which till now had wholly slipped from her thoughts. In another moment she was closely questioning Miriam both about the letter and about the cause of her sudden change in manner and spirits.

Miriam, after a short and ineffectual effort to disguise her feelings, burst into tears, and drawing the roll of the smaller letter from her bosom, exclaimed, "My mother, forgive me that I read it in thy absence—forgive me for keeping it so long from

thee. Fain would I have saved thee the bitter tidings which it contains. Since my cousin Berith's first letter, my uncle has been cruelly and treacherously slain by our own countrymen; Berith is left an orphan in the hands of strangers; and ere this is, together with the king's daughters and the prophet, carried violently away into the land of Egypt."

Thus briefly Miriam related the sad contents of the letter to her mother. Nor did Hadassah dare to doubt the truth of it. It explained to her mind, awakened and alarmed as it was at this moment, many trifling things which had just occurred to raise her suspicions and doubts. The conversation which she had overheard among the citizens in her walk to and from the prison that evening—the threats and ill-omened words dropped by them against their Hebrew captives—the absence of Talmon at that hour—all seemed now explained. The same opportunity doubtless which had brought her these letters from Judea, had also brought the intelligence to Babylon of this fresh rebellion against the authority of the king. No wonder then that there was fresh anger and ill-will kindled against those who were of the same guilty nation.

Talmon she ventured to hope had been delaying to collect some particulars of what had happened; thus amid tears and silent prayers that he might speedily arrive to share with her this fresh affliction, she continued anxiously listening to every approaching sound of footsteps, trusting they might be his. It was true, as she supposed, that

the tidings which she had just received were made known in Babylon at the same time, and excited both in the king and people fresh indignation against that nation whose very scattered remnants, after their late severe punishment, could thus venture to defy the power of their conquerors.

Not only had Gedaliah, the Jewish governor whom Nebuzaradan had set over the few poor inhabitants of Judea, been slain, but some also of the Chaldeans, who chanced to be at Mizpeh with him.* The perpetrator of this treacherous and rebellious deed was Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, one of the remaining royal house of Judah, induced probably by jealousy of the authority intrusted to Gedaliah. Such conduct, though it had been chiefly the act of an individual, was the means of bringing down additional troubles on the few unhappy survivors still left in Judea. Urged by fear of further punishment from the Babylonians, they persisted, contrary still to the advice of the prophet Jeremiah, in flying into Egypt and forcing him and their other fellow countrymen to accompany them. There at length, as they had been warned, a worse fate from the hands of the very same Babylonians overtook them in common with the Egyptians themselves.†

In Babylon the arrival of the intelligence was soon followed by new hardships and persecutions upon the captives. Many were sent to drag out the miserable remainder of their lives in the unceasing

* Jer. xli. † Jer. xlii. 16, 17.

labour of forming some of the vast canals which intersected that level country—others were doomed as slaves to the brick-kiln, from month to month and year to year bound down to uninterrupted toil and drudgery, till health and strength and life sank together beneath the task. Often amid that ceaseless scene of labour in a foreign clime, their thoughts travelled back to that land of hills and valleys which was now enjoying the sabbaths of which they had in past years deprived her. How welcome now to the former possessors of that land would have been that repose and those intervals from labour which they had once stubbornly and impiously rejected—how more than welcome those appointed seasons of rejoicing before their GOD, which they had heretofore turned into revelry and idolatry.

Though many were thus scattered through the province of Babylon, yet others still remained in the capital—and some few in high and influential posts. But against them jealousy on the part of the citizens soon found means of persecution. Those who continued to show respect to their own religion were made objects of reproach and insult—and often driven to conform to the idolatrous rites of the Chaldeans. Upon any provocation their lives were held cheap, and were frequently taken with impunity. Their bodies were cast forth to open scorn, and denied the rites of burial.* Any attempt to break through such an edict

* See Tobit i. 18, 19, 20; and Baruch iii. 8.

brought death and a similar punishment upon the offender himself.

On the evening when Talmon first gained permission for a short absence from the prison, he had not gone many steps in the direction of Hadassah's dwelling, hurrying onwards as he was without a moment's delay, when he was stopped by the imploring voice of a woman who, in his own language, appealed to him in earnest accents of fear and suppressed grief.

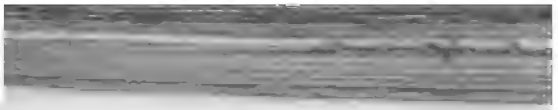
"Thou art a Hebrew," said she, "stay thy steps, I implore thee, for a few moments, and help a fellow-countrywoman, and a widow, in the last request she will ever make to man. Not many yards hence," she continued, "the dead body of my son lies unburied, and trampled under foot by our enemies. They slew him this day at morn, and they have cruelly wounded me for attempting to remove him. It is now dark, and none is passing by to see us. Whoever thou art, in the name of our country and our GOD, oh help a widowed mother in this hour of her need." To such an appeal Talmon's heart, softened as it had been of late by his own affliction, would not allow him to turn a deaf ear. "Haste thee, woman," said he, "lead on speedily, and I will put my life in thy hand and follow thee. May the GOD of our fathers protect us!"

The tidings of that day had, unhappily for Talmon, caused double vigilance to be used by the citizens against the Hebrews. His benevolent attempt was detected. Seized in the fatal act of

disobedience, he was at once hurried away—doomed alas! to share, in a few hours after, the same fate of an ignominious death, and of dishonour after death, from the latter of which he had kindly, but in vain, attempted to rescue another.

The next morning found Hadassah a widow—her children orphans, helpless, unprotected, friendless—in a foreign city—surrounded by enemies to her religion and her country—her last hope gone—and in its stead "a trembling heart, failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind."

"In those days there were many widows in Israel"—we have told the tale of but one of them.

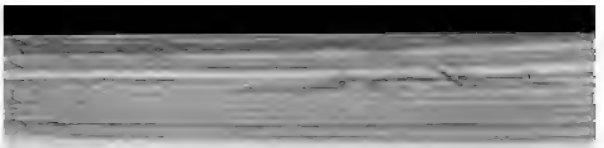


The

Lamentations of Jeremiah,

METRICALLY RENDERED AFTER THE ORIGINAL.

"Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people."—Jer. ix. 1.



INTRODUCTION

TO THE

LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

"THE Lamentations of Jeremiah are very properly distributed into five chapters, each of them containing a distinct elegy, consisting of twenty-two periods, according to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet; although it is in the first four chapters only that the several periods begin, acrostic-wise, with the different letters following each other in alphabetical order. By this contrivance the metre is more precisely marked and ascertained, particularly in the third chapter where each period contains three verses, which have all the same initial letter. The two first chapters in like manner consist of triplets, excepting only the seventh period of the first, and the nineteenth of the second, which have each a supernumerary line. The fourth chapter resembles the three former in metre, but the periods are only couplets. In the fifth chapter the periods are couplets, but of a considerably shorter measure."—DR. BLAYNEY.

"The intention of this acrostic or alphabetic arrangement was to assist the memory in retaining sentences not much connected, and the same method was adopted, and is even still used by the Syrians, Arabians, and Persians. It is remarkable also that though the verses of the fifth chapter are short, yet those of the other chapters seem to be nearly half as long again as those which usually occur in Hebrew poetry; and the prophet appears to have chosen this measure as more flowing and accommodated to the effusions of sorrow, and perhaps as more agreeable to the nature of funeral dirges.

"This poem affords the most elegant variety of affecting images that ever probably were collected into so small a compass. The scenes of affliction, the circumstances of distress, are painted with such beautiful combination, that we contemplate everywhere the most affecting picture of desolation and misery. The prophet reiterates his complaints in the most affecting style, and aggravates his sorrow with a boldness and force of description that correspond with the magnitude and religious importance of the calamities displayed to view. In the instructive strain of an inspired writer he reminds his countrymen of the grievous rebellions that had provoked the LORD to 'abhor His sanctuary;' confesses that it was of GOD'S mercies they were not utterly consumed; and points out the sources of evil in the iniquities of their false prophets and priests. He then with indignant irony threatens Edom with destruction for rejoicing over the miseries of Judea, opens a consolatory

prospect of deliverance and future protection to Zion; and concludes with an affecting address to GOD, to 'consider the reproach' of His people and to renew their prosperity.

"It is worthy to be observed that Jeremiah in endeavouring to promote resignation in his countrymen represents his own deportment under afflictions, in terms which have a prophetic cast, so strikingly are they descriptive of the patience and conduct of our SAVIOUR under His sufferings. The prophet indeed, in the meek endurance of unmerited persecution was an illustrious type of CHRIST."—GRAY'S *Key to the Old Testament.*

"The Lamentations were not composed till after the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, and the depopulation of the country by the transmigration of all its inhabitants; which events are described not at all in the style of prophetic predictions, but alluded to and bewailed as what had been already fully accomplished, and brought to pass. We cannot admire too much the full and graceful flow of pathetic eloquence in which the author pours forth the effusions of a patriotic heart, and piously weeps over the ruins of his venerable country. Never was there a more rich and elegant variety of beautiful images ranged together within so small a compass, nor more happily chosen and applied. The prophet's peculiar talent lay in working up and expressing the passions of grief and pity; and unhappily for him, as a man and a citizen, he met with a subject but too well calculated to give his genius its full display."—DR. BLAYNEY.

"One book of Scripture there is, in which GOD has pleased to preserve the memorial of this great struggle of religion, both in its public and its private state; wherein every feeling and every reflection, adapted to such a scene, are recorded and expressed to the life. It is the short volume of 'the Lamentations' of that prophet who lived in the midst of it; a book which is the perfect moral history of those times and of religion, in its public and its interior personal trials; a book of more profound and exquisite feeling than can be equalled in any of the most boasted of uninspired writings, and of the most exact delineation on the whole question of the dark and fearful visitation of GOD, under which His church and people were cast."—DAVISON *on Prophecy*. Diss. VI. Part 3.

"The Jews denominate this book 'Echah' (How) from the first word of the text; or sometimes they call it Kinnoth, which implies tears, alluding to the mournful character of the work, of which one would conceive, says Mr. Lowth, that every letter was written with a tear, every word the sound of a broken heart."—GRAY'S *Key to the Old Testament*.

THE LAMENTATIONS OF JEREMIAH.

CHAPTER I.

"Jeremiah begins this his first elegy with mourning over the sad reverse of fortune which his country had experienced; at the same time sorrowfully confessing that all her miseries were of her own seeking, the result of national wickedness and rebellion against God. In the midst of the discourse he on a sudden withdraws himself from view, and leaves Jerusalem to continue the complaint; who humbly solicits from the Divine compassion that comfort and redress which she found it in vain to look for from any other quarter."—Blayney.

HIEREMIA

CHAPTER I.

And it came to pass after that Israel had been carried away captive, and Jerusalem was become desolate, that Jeremiah sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said—

א

How lone she sits—once thronged with busy crowd!
How widowed, she to whom the nations bowed!
Princess erewhile, now lowly vassal of the proud!

ב

By night she weeps—her tears rest on her cheeks.
Of all her lovers, none her comfort seeks.
False friends! each on her head his treacherous malice wreaks.

ג

For woe is Judah into bondage gone;—
In heathen lands she dwells, nor rest hath known.
Their toils in narrow straits have foes around her thrown.

ד

Her ways deserted mourn—for none pass by
Unto her feasts;—her priests, her virgins sigh—
Her gates are void, and she in bitterness doth lie.

ה

Her foes prevail—the victor's joy is theirs;—
She for her sins the stroke of justice bears.
Her sons are slaves—their neck the yoke of bondage wears.

ו

From Zion's daughter far hath beauty fled;—
Her chiefs—as harts no more in pastures fed,
But famished and pursued, their steps have feebly sped.

ז

When stern affliction's hand abasement wrought,
And grief in Salem, she with saddened heart bethought
Her of her happier days;
When fell her sons forsaken and forlorn,
Her end the foe beheld, and over her, in scorn,
Durst impious mockings raise.

ח

Grievous hath been her sin;—for this removed,
Her shame they've seen who once her beauty loved;—
Sighing, she turneth back, dishonoured, self-reproved.

ט

Soiled are her robes, yet heeds she not her end;
Therefore brought wondrous low—none to befriend—
Yea, LORD, exulting foes to vex her, and offend.

י

Unhallowed hands her pleasant things deface—
And in her sight, lo! men of sinful race,
Forbidden, LORD, by Thee, profane her holy place.

כ

Her people sigh—her famished children pine;—
For bread their cherished treasures they resign.
Mark well, O LORD, how fallen, how vile a lot is mine!

ל

Is't nought to you that pass? Behold and see,
Was ever grief like that He lays on me—
JEHOVAH, in His day of wrath and jealousy?

מ

Into my bones He sent His fiery ray;
Caught in His net—He stopped me in the way;
My strength to faintness turned, the weary live-long day.

נ

My sins into a yoke His hand hath bound—
Wreathed on my neck they bear me to the ground;—
By Him betrayed—no help, no strength is in me found.

ס

My mighty ones He put to open shame;
To slay my young His summoned armies came;
He trode as in a winepress Judah's virgin frame.

ע

For this I weep—mine eyes, mine eyes o'erflow;
Far off is he that should have soothed my woe;
My sons are desolate—my foes yet mightier grow.

פ

She spreads her hands for help, but findeth none—
All, all are Jacob's foes—this He hath done;
Salem, as one unclean, her neighbours loathe and shun.

צ

I have rebelled. LORD, righteous is Thy throne;—
Hear, all ye people—be my sorrows known:
My maidens and my youths in foreign bondage groan.

ק

I called my friends—they came but to betray:
Lifeless around me priests and elders lay—
Their hand no morsel found life's failing powers to stay.

ר

Behold, LORD, how my troubled bosom heaves!
This rebel heart what ceaseless anguish grieves!
At home there is as death—abroad the sword bereaves.

ש

My sighs they heard, but none would pity show:
Yea, all rejoiced that Thou hast laid me low.
They yet shall be as I—Thy day shall make it so.

ת

Thou, LORD, shalt visit their iniquity:
'Tis thus for sin that Thou hast dealt with me—
Witness my many sighs, my heart-sick misery.

CHAPTER II.

"The prophet gives a melancholy detail of the dire effects of the divine anger in the subversion of both the civil and religious constitution of the Jews, and in that extreme wretchedness and distress to which individuals of every denomination were thereby reduced. He represents the misery of his country as without a parallel, and charges her prophets with having betrayed her into ruin by their false and flattering suggestions. He describes the astonishment of passengers on viewing the desolate condition of Jerusalem. They call out to her to implore GOD'S compassion for the removal of those heavy judgments which in the height of His displeasure He had brought upon her."—BLAYNEY.

CHAPTER II.

א

Lo! in JEHOVAH'S wrath how darkling clouds
O'er Zion lower!
Her beauty He hath spoiled—from heaven to earth
Cast down her power;
His footstool He, alas! remembered not
In His dread anger's hour.

ב

All Jacob's dwellings He hath swallowed up,
Nor pity shown;
Daughter of Judah, thy strong fortresses
He hath o'erthrown;
He sparèd not to humble, and profane
Her princes and her throne.

ג

The horn of Israel's strength was clean cut off
Beneath His ire;
His right hand from the war bade Judah's hosts
With shame retire;
'Gainst Jacob waxed His wrath as furious blast
Of fierce, wide-wasting fire.

ד

He stood with arm upraised—with hostile look
His bow He drew—
Her eyes' desire, the choice and flower of all
Her youth He slew;
Through Zion's tents swift as devouring flames
His outpoured anger flew.

ה

Israel the LORD hath wasted utterly,
As ruthless foe—
Her stately palaces consumed—her holds
Of strength laid low;
In Judah He hath multiplied the voice
Of mourning and of woe.

ו

His chosen tent, as a frail garden lodge,
His hand hath torn—
Forgotten made in Zion solemn feast,
And Sabbath morn;
ndignant He on king and priests hath poured
The fury of His scorn.

ז

His temple He hath loathed—His altars cast
With shame away;
To other hands her princely halls hath given—
The spoiler's prey;
Rude voices in His house were heard—as loud
As erst in festal day.

ח

Zion, it was JEHOVAH'S will to raze
Thy bulwarks tall;
He stretched His line, nor would He from the work
His hand recall;
Together, at His word, they mourned—they fell—
Fortress and lofty wall.

ט

In ruins sank her gates—their broken bars
In fragments lay;
Her kings among the heathen dwell;—her law
Hath passed away;
No more the Seer his heaven-sent message finds,
Nor weaves the prophet's lay.

י

Thine elders, Zion, sit amid the dust,
Silent and sad—
Their heads with ashes hoar—their aged limbs
With sack-cloth clad;
Thy virgins, Salem, bow their heads for grief—
And none hath made them glad.

כ

My soul is vexed within me—ceaseless tears
Consume mine eye;
My people! melts my very heart to view
Thy misery!
Suckling and child, cast forth in her broad ways,
For weakness swooning lie.

ל

"Oh give us corn—give wine;"—ye mothers, 'tis
Your children's prayer;
While as the wounded in her streets they fall,
And fainting there,
Pour out their soul upon the breast, that first
Their helpless childhood bare.

מ

Salem! how shall I counsel thee?—with whom
Thy lot compare?
Where find a doom, whose measure, sad as thine,
May soothe thy care?
Thy breach (none wider hath the sea-wave made)
What healer can repair?

נ

Thy prophets saw not truth—vain, idle tales
Their lips conveyed—
Thy sins they hid, though haply stern reproof
Thy woes had stayed;
False visions of thy banishment they saw—
Vain burthens on thee laid.

ס

The traveller, as he passeth, wond'ring, claps
His hands at thee—
O'er Salem strangers wag the head, and hiss
Despitefully;—
"Perfection" was her name—"the earth's delight"—
Oh say, can this be she?

פ

Thy foes have oped their mouths—and bitter things
Against thee say;
They gnash upon thee with their teeth, and cry
"Behold our prey"—
"Lo! we have found—our eyes at length have seen
The long expected day."

ע

The LORD, He hath devised—He hath fulfilled
His will and choice—
What once He built, again destroyed—unmoved
By Pity's voice;
Thine adversaries' horn He hath set up,
And made thy foes rejoice.

צ

Thou ruined wall!—her heartfelt cries to GOD
Went up for thee—
Then weep thou too—as river-streams that flow
Incessantly;
Rest not—nor close the apple of thine eye
In soft security.

ק

Arise by night, and let thine heart in prayer
Before the LORD be poured forth, or e'er
The night-watch thee prevent;
Lift up thine hands to Him—entreat His aid
For these, thy little ones, around thee laid,
Fainting and famine-spent.

ר

Mark well, O LORD, with whom Thou thus hast dealt
In angry mood;
O shall her suckling-infant's flesh be made
The mother's food?
Shall blood of Priest and Prophet stain those courts
Where Thine own altars stood?

ש

Strown is the ground with frames of tender youth,
And hoary age—
Virgins and youths alike have fallen beneath
The avenger's rage;
In wrath Thou slewest them—nor wouldst that aught
Thine anger should assuage.

ת

My terrors in full concourse Thou hast called
From all sides round—
In Thy dread day not one of all my sons
Was scatheless found;
Those, whom I swaddled and brought up, the foe
Hath smitten to the ground.

CHAPTER III.

"In this chapter the prophet seems to have had it in view to instruct his countrymen in the lesson of bearing themselves well under adversity. To this end he first of all sets himself forth as an example of the most severe and trying afflictions. He then points out the inexhaustible mercies of GOD as the never failing source of his consolation and hope, and exhorts others to patience and quiet resignation under the like circumstances, showing that GOD is ever gracious to those that wait on Him; that He is prone to pardon and pity, and takes no delight in afflicting mankind, but turns away with disgust from all acts of oppression and malignant cruelty. He asserts the Divine supremacy in the dispensations of good and evil, and argues that no man has a right to complain when he is punished according to his deserts. He therefore recommends it to his fellow sufferers to examine themselves, and turn to GOD with contrite hearts, sincerely deploring the sinfulness of their conduct, which had provoked the Divine justice to treat them with such extraordinary severity. He professeth himself deeply affected with the calamities of his country. But calling to mind the desperate circumstances from which he had heretofore been rescued by the Divine aid, he declareth his hope that the same good Providence will frustrate the malice of his present enemies, and turn the scornful reproach they had cast upon him to their own confusion."—BLAYNEY.

CHAPTER III.

א

Lo! I am he, whose heart, by sorrow worn,
His chastening rod hath borne;
The LORD my steps hath into darkness led,
Nor light upon me shed.
On me by day, by night, His heavy hand He lays—
The LORD my cause betrays.

ב

Bruised are my bones—my flesh and skin are made
Like withered age to fade.
My way He hath built up, as with a wall
Of travail and of gall;
My feet hath set in places dark—dark e'en as those
Wherein the dead repose.

ג

Hedged in, I cannot fly; His chain around
My weary neck is bound.
In vain with cries and tears I loudly shout—
My prayer He shutteth out;
Hewn stones my path enclose—in error's wild'ring maze
My onward course He stays.

ד

As couching lion He hath been—as bear
Lurking in hidden lair;
My steps He hath misled—my limbs hath torn,
And made my strength to mourn;
At me His bow was bent—and for His arrows keen
This breast a mark hath been.

ה

Well-sped, the swift sons of his quiver rest
Deep rankling in my breast;
All day my people's mockings have I borne—
Myself their song, their scorn;
With wormwood He hath made me drunk—my soul with bread
Of bitterness hath fed.

ו

My teeth He hath bruised sore with grating stone,
My head with ashes strown—
From peace hath set me far; her once glad lot
For grief my soul forgot.
"No hope for me in GOD"—"no succours from on high"—
Such was my bitter cry.

ז

Then oft my heart each sorrow would recall—
Life's wormwood, and its gall—
Each several woe retrace, till brooding thought
Deep shame within me wrought—
Yet, LORD, rememb'ring Thee, my soul fresh comfort drew,
And hope brake forth anew.

ח

That we are not consumed, LORD, 'tis of Thee,
Of Thy sure clemency.
Great is Thy faithfulness—like gentle dews
Mercies each morn renews;
The LORD my portion is—"the LORD," my spirit cries—
On Him my hope relies.

ט

To those who wait for Him the LORD is kind;
They who thus seek shall find.
'Tis good in quiet hope to abide the end,
Till GOD deliverance send.
'Tis good that men in days of early youth should know
Beneath the yoke to bow.

י

He, who in youth hath bowed, in silence bears
The weight of after cares;
He humbleth him—he stoopeth to the ground,
If hope may yet be found.
His cheek he to the smiter gives—shame and rebukes
His chastened spirit brooks.

כ

For GOD will not His face for ever hide,
Nor cast His own aside;
But though He grieve, yet will He pity take
For His great mercy's sake.
He doth not willingly deal forth affliction's blow,
Nor vex mankind with woe.

ל

To crush the fallen—with foot of pride to tread
Upon the captive's head—
Man's right in sight of Heaven to turn aside—
Justice and truth to hide—
To wrong the helpless weak—LORD, shall such lawless might
Find favour in Thy sight?

מ

Lo! who is he that saith, and it shall stand
Against the LORD's command?
Evil and good alike—come they not down
From that Almighty One?
Dare living soul complain—dare murmurs rise within,
When GOD corrects for sin?

נ

Oh! seek we then our secret faults to learn,
And to the LORD return;
Be heart and hand upraised with earnest cry
To Him who dwells on high.
LORD, with rebellious mind against Thee have we striven,
Nor hast Thou yet forgiven.

ס

Dark storms of persecution o'er us lowered,
Thy ruthless sword devoured;
Thyself Thou coveredst with a cloud, lest prayer
Should reach Thy presence there.
LORD, Thou hast made us dross, rejected and cast forth—
The refuse of the earth.

פ

Men of fierce tongue, with bitter malice fired,
Against our peace conspired.
Snares and dismay o'ertook us—wild alarm—
The fell destroyer's arm.
For the lost daughter of my people—for her woe
Rivers of sorrow flow.

ע

Rests not my grief—the tear-drop from mine eye
Still trickleth ceaselessly,
Until the LORD look down, with kindly face,
From heaven His dwelling-place;
My city! for thy daughter's sake mine eyes impart
Their sorrows to mine heart.

צ

With causeless hate, my steps from place to place,
Like hunted bird, they chase;
As 'reft of life, in dungeons dark I dwell—
My home the flinty cell.
"Lost, severed from my own!" I cried, as o'er my soul
I heard deep waters roll.

ק

From out those noisome depths I sent my cry
To Thee, O LORD Most High;
"Thou for the prisoner's low-breathed sigh dost care—
Then hear, oh! hear my prayer."
And when I called, O LORD, Thou drewest near to aid;
"Fear not," Thy pity said.

ר

Thou pleadedst for my soul in time of strife—
Thou hast redeemed my life;
Thou see'st my wrongs—my cause do Thou defend,
My Guardian and my Friend.
Mine adversaries' wrath—their schemes of treachery
Are not unmarked by Thee.

ש

Each crafty plan, yea each malicious word,
By Thee is quickly heard;
The sland'rous lips, the ceaseless arts of those
Who all my ways oppose;
At home, or in their walk, at morn and ev'n am I
Their song, their mockery.

ת

Thou, LORD, their deeds in Thy great reck'ning day
With justice shalt repay—
Their hearts with withering grief shalt cause to burst—
Dread portion of the cursed!
LORD, by Thy persecuting rod shall they be driven
Forth from the face of Heaven.

CHAPTER IV.

"The prophet contrasts in various affecting instances the wretched and deplorable circumstances of the Jewish nation with the flourishing state of their affairs in former times; and ascribes the unhappy change principally to the profligacy of their priests and prophets, which had drawn upon them the universal abhorrence of GOD and man. The people proceed with lamenting their hopeless condition, and in a particular manner the captivity of their sovereign. The judgment of Edom is at length foretold, together with a final cessation of Zion's calamities."—BLAYNEY.

CHAPTER IV.

א

How faded is the gold—the most fine gold!
How pale its hue, how sullied, how defiled!
The temple-stones, from their foundations rolled,
Along her streets are piled.

ב

Zion, thy sons, whom thou wert wont to prize
As gold, so precious in thy sight were they,
Are now but earthen vessels in men's eyes,
Vile as the potter's clay.

ג

The monster-dwellers—of the ocean-main
Their younglings feed and tend, by pity moved;
But heartless, as the ostrich of the plain,
My country's daughter proved.

ד

Fast in its clammy bed the tongue lies bound,
The suckling's thirst no streams of moisture slake,
The famished children pine, but none is found
Their daily bread to break.

ה

They, who were wont to feed on dainty fare,
Are desolate—their resting place the ground;
The limbs which scarlet only deigned to wear,
Embrace corruption's mound.

ו

O daughter of my people! thy sad fate
Is heavier than the curse on Sodom's land;
She in a moment fell—nor knew the weight
Of misery's lingering hand.

ז

Thy Nazarites as snow were fair to view—
Pure as the milky stream, and white were they;
More ruddy than the ruby's was their hue,
More bright than sapphire's ray.

ח

Now duskier than the coal—no longer known
For comeliness to all the passers-by;
Together cleave the shrivelled skin and bone,
As withered branch and dry.

ט

Far happier, whom the sword hath lifeless left,
Than they whom Famine's wasting weapons slay!
These wretched ones, of earth's kind fruits bereft,
Heart-stricken pine away.

י

O piteous sight! fell hunger to allay,
Their infants' flesh the mothers' hands prepare—
My people! in Destruction's hapless day,
Such, such was their sad fare.

כ

The fountain-depths of wrath His arm laid dry,
Opening on her the flood gates of His ire;
Her strong foundations hath the LORD Most High
Swept with devouring fire.

ל

Salem! what stranger's tongue durst e'er foretell,
What jealous hopes of earth's proud potentates,
That foes should stand within thy citadel,
Or tread thy fortress gates?

מ

Yet it hath been, for evil was thy way—
Prophet and priest alike have trespassed;
Hand joined with hand, in face of open day,
The righteous blood to shed.

נ

In darkness, as the blind, their feet have run,
Nor guilt's foul track at every step would see;
The blood-stained garment's touch their neighbours shun,
Loathing impurity.

ס

"Depart, nor spread infection in our way,"
"Unclean, come ye not near," the heathen cried,
"Hence, wanderers, outcasts, here ye may not stay,
Nor in our land abide."

פ

Scattered and lone, their lot the LORD hath made,
Nor, wrathful, would their grief with pity view;
For why? His priests they honoured not, nor paid
To age its tribute due.

ע

Ah woe is us! in unrest and alarm,
Our weary eyes for aid have vainly sought;
In watching have we watched for those, whose arm
Hath no deliverance wrought.

צ

Our wonted paths, for fear, we dare no more
Frequent—at every step compelled to fly;
All, all is past—our peaceful days are o'er,
Our latter end is nigh.

ק

With speed yet swifter than the eagle's flight
Pursuers chased us on the mountain side—
Anon, in pathless plains, lost to our sight,
Their treacherous snares they plied.

ר

He, on whose head the LORD's anointing fell—
Our life—our hope into their wiles was lured—
He 'neath whose shade we trusted long to dwell,
'Mid heathen foes secured.

ש

Then be thy heart in triumph lifted up,
Thou land of Uz, that boastest Edom's name;
Yet unto thee the cup shall pass—the cup
Of drunkenness and shame.

ת

Zion hath paid for her iniquity,
No more will He her sons to bondage lead;
Daughter of Edom! He will visit thee,
And search out each foul deed.

CHAPTER V.

"In the Syriac, Vulgate, and Arabic versions, this chapter is entitled 'The Prayer of Jeremiah.' But no such title appears in the Hebrew copies or in the Septuagint. It is rather a memorial, representing in the name of the whole body of Jewish exiles the many and grievous hardships they groaned under, and humbly entreating GOD to commiserate their wretchedness, and to restore them once more to His favour and to their ancient prosperity. The whole may be considered as an epilogue or conclusion well adapted to the contents of the preceding chapters."—BLAYNEY.

CHAPTER V.

א

MARK, LORD, what hath befallen us; our lot
Of sorrow and of shame, forget it not.

ב

Lost is our goodly heritage; our lands
And homes have passed into the alien's hands.

ג

LO! we are fatherless—no friend to share
The orphan's grief, the widowed mother's care.

ד

The stream to quench our thirst for price is bought,
And for our fuel tribute sternly sought.

ה

Our neck the oppressor's yoke hath sorely pressed;
Unceasingly we toil, and know no rest.

ו

For lack of bread have we to Egypt bowed,
And to proud Asshur's hosts allegiance vowed.

ז

Our fathers sinned, but they have ceased to be,
And we their sons bear their iniquity.

ח

Servants have been our masters; proudly they
Have ruled; and none hath freed us from their sway.

ט

Our bread we sought in trembling and in fear;
The spoiler of the wilderness was near.

י

Crept o'er our skin the oven's dusky hue,
As fierce and fiercer famine's terrors grew.

כ

On Judah's matrons hands of force were laid,
And maidens in her streets to ruffian arms betrayed.

ל

Our princes on the accursed tree they hung—
Our elders' hearts with keen revilings wrung.

מ

Our sons as slave-born to the mill they bore,
Our children fell beneath their burthens sore.

נ

Elders no more in all our gates are found—
Our youths have ceased to raise sweet music's sound.

ס

The joys of all the merry-hearted fail—
The dance is turned into the mourner's wail.

ע

The crown is fallen, is fallen from off our head—
Woe, woe is us that we have trespassèd!

פ

Therefore hath faintness o'er our spirit passed,
And cloudy dimness on our eyes is cast.

צ

For desolate is Zion's mountain home—
The wild fox there may unmolested roam.

ק

Yet Thou, LORD, ever One, no change hast known;
From age to age unshaken is Thy throne.

ר

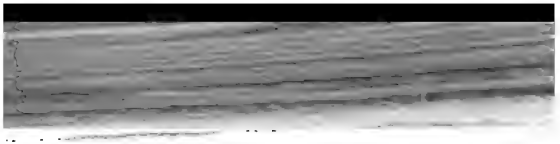
Then why so long forget our fallen state?
Why still forsake Thine own that on Thee wait?

ש

LORD, turn us, and we shall be turned; renew
Our days, as Thou of old wert wont to do.

ת

Wilt Thou reject us wholly?—shall Thy scorn,
With wrath unmeasured, still against us burn?



NOTES TO THE LAMENTATIONS.

Chapter ii. verse 6. (Page 412.)

ALLUSION is here beautifully made to the temporary sheds or huts which are often to be seen in the gardens of Palestine. Similarly Isaiah says in describing the solitary and ruined condition of Judea (chap. i. v. 8), "The daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers." They are described as temporary huts, covered with boughs, straw, turf, or the like material, for a shelter from the heat by day, and the cold and dews by night, for the watchman that kept the garden or vineyard, during the short season while the fruit was ripening, and presently removed when it had served that purpose. See also Job xxvii. 18. "He buildeth his house as a moth, and as a booth that the keeper maketh." The custom still prevails. A traveller in 1841 writes as follows:—"This," says he, alluding to Isaiah i. 8, "is a very happy illustration, for many such miserable little huts we saw lying in decay, having served during the few weeks of harvest as a shelter to those who watched and guarded the fruits, and which were then deserted. The fields which we passed between Antioch and Laodicea were full of such forsaken sheds."—*Palestine*, by the Rev. P. WILBRAHAM.

Chapter ii. verse 19. (Page 415.)

The image in this place as in many other passages of Scripture, is taken from the temple service, in which there was appointed a constant watch, day and night by the Levites; and among them this service seems to have belonged particularly to the singers; see 1 Chron. ix. 33. Now the watches in the east, even to this day, are performed by a loud cry from time to time of the watchmen to mark the time and that very frequently, and in order to show that they themselves are constantly attentive to their duty. Hence the watchmen are said by the Prophet Isaiah, chap. lii. 8, "to lift up their voices," and in chap. lxii. 6, they are commanded not to keep silence; and the greatest reproach to them is "that they are dumb dogs, they cannot bark, dreamers, sluggards, looking to slumber." * * The watchmen in the camp of the caravans go their rounds, crying one after another "God is one, He is merciful," and often add, "Take heed to yourselves." (Tavernier, Voyage de Perse, Liv. i. chap. 10.) The 114th Psalm gives us an example of the temple-watch. The whole Psalm is nothing more than the alternate cry of two different divisions of the watch. The first watch addresses the second, reminding them of their duty; the second answers by a solemn blessing; the address and the answer seem both to be a set form, which each division proclaimed or sung aloud at stated intervals to notify the time of night.

First Chorus.

"Come on now, bless ye JEHOVAH, all ye servants of JEHOVAH,
Ye that stand in the house of JEHOVAH in the night;
Lift up your hands towards the sanctuary,
And bless ye JEHOVAH."

Second Chorus.

"JEHOVAH bless thee out of Sion;
He that made heaven and earth."

The form which the watch made use of on these occasions was always a short sentence expressing some pious sentiment of which JEHOVAH was the subject, and it is remarkable that the custom in the east in this respect also still continues the very same; as it appears by the example above given from Tavernier. (See Lowth on Isaiah, Introd. chap. lxii.)

Before the captivity the night was divided into three parts or watches. It is probable that these watches varied in length according to the seasons of the year; consequently those who had a long and inclement winter watch to encounter would ardently desire the approach of morning light to terminate their watch. This circumstance would beautifully illustrate the fervour of the Psalmist's devotion (Psalm cxxx.) "My soul fleeth unto the LORD before the morning watch, I say before the morning watch." And again, Psalm cxix. 148, "Mine eyes prevent the night watches." Similarly the Prophet in this passage of the Lamentations recommends to his fellow-countrymen such "watching unto prayer," that at the stated periods of the night it should not require even the voice of the watchman to remind them of it, but that they should rather anticipate him.—See HORNE'S *Introduction.* Vol. III. Part 2. Page 169.

Chapter iv. verse 3. (Page 427.)

Compare Job xxxix. 13.—"Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks, or wings and feathers unto the ostrich? which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers."

Chapter v. verse 22. (Page 437.)

Upon the authority of Rosenmuller the form of the sentence in the concluding couplet is changed from that which our own translation gives, to the interrogative. It seems, as he observes, to agree better so with chap. iii. stanza 11.

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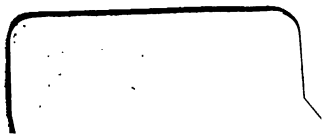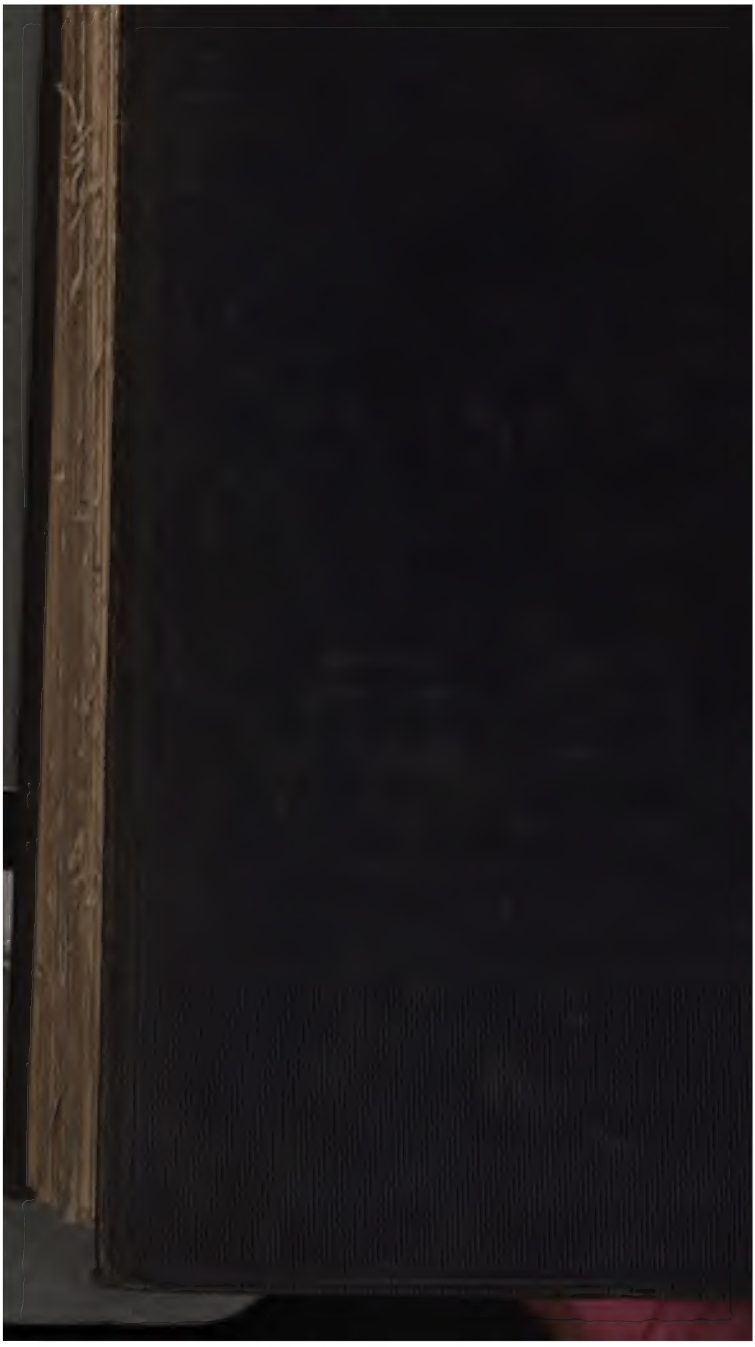
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